THE WONDER GIRL

A TOURIST TALE OF CALIFORNIA

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THE WONDER GIRL

A Tourist Tale of California

BY

ANNA E. SATTERLEE
Author of "Love's Equality," etc.

BOSTON
SHERMAN, FRENCH & COMPANY
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To

tourists who have visited Los Angeles on their way to and from the Panama-California and Panama-Pacific International Expositions

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THE WONDER GIRL

As glad as spring, as gay as June;
From fear of trouble quite immune;
Her heart with summer warmth o'erflows,
And melts for Age its winter snows.

A Wonder Girl, who brings to youth
A realistic sense of Truth,
And proves that he who largely gives,
Receives full measure while he lives.

AUTHOR.

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CHAPTER I

GUESTS ANTICIPATED

The news came late in the month of January.

Mr. and Mrs. Morley were at breakfast in their pretty dining room, where dazzling rays of California sunshine poured in gloriously through plate glass windows, giving the polished floor and azure tinted walls, the panels and mirrors of the mahogany buffet and its array of silver and cut-glass, a glowing touch, while a part danced merrily over the wavy brown hair above Mrs. Morley's right temple.

A maid brought in, on a silver tray, the letter containing the news and laid it beside the lady's plate.

Mrs. Morley glanced at the postmark and passed the missive on to her husband.

"From your Brother George's wife," he said in a declaratory tone, as he returned the letter unsealed.

"Yes," she answered.

There was little of interest within, except mention of a proposed visit, of which Mrs. Morley read aloud:

"'Sister Ruby intends going to Los Angeles about a month from now, with a party on their way to the

Panama-Pacific Exposition and the other fair at San Diego. If convenient, she would like to spend a few days with you, and with your permission, will bring a girl-friend, Carol Wilton. Nothing has been said to Carol about it, so if you would rather not consent, it will be perfectly all right; but I know you love company of the proper sort, and it would be worth all it would cost you to hear the young lady laugh. Besides, she sings equal to a whole chorus of birds,— began caroling around the house when a mere baby, her mother told me. For that reason she was eventually christened Carol, though at first they had named her Ruth.

" 'The Wiltons are new people here,— settled in our neighborhood last year; but we know they are genuine. They came from Illinois so Mr. Wilton could be nearer his mining interests. By the way, he has relatives in New England who know Charles's Uncle Eben.

" 'The rest of the party will stop at a hotel. They all want to visit Los Angeles,— even those who have been there before. Strange, think you? I wish I could go myself, but George would have a spasm if I left him to " bach it," and you know this is his busiest season.' "

Mrs. Morley had once looked up during the reading to observe the effect on her husband. At the time he was apparently absorbed in seasoning a soft-boiled egg which he had just broken into an egg cup. Now, regardless of other interests, she drew a long breath and exclaimed:

" What do you think of *that*, Charles Henry? "

When Mrs. Morley addressed her husband by both his given names he knew that by some means she had been particularly impressed. Though a thorough business man, he was of the sociable kind, and inclined to hospitality, so he answered cleverly:

"Good! It will give us a change,— something interesting as a recreation."

"Phil is coming then, too, isn't he?" she asked with a perhaps-you-may-have-forgotten-it air.

"That needn't make any difference. We have an extra guest room, haven't we; and plenty of dishes and things?"

"Ye-s — but two girls and one young man! Rather one-sided it looks to me."

"We might write Phil to hunt up another bachelor and bring him along, or ask him to defer his visit until some other time."

"Oh, I wouldn't put him off for anything. I haven't seen him since he was in knee trousers; but he was a nice boy then. Now he is a university graduate. I wonder if he is a ladies' man, — if the girls would bore him?"

"They ought not. There were three in Uncle Eben's family, you remember. Possibly they spoiled him. But I should suppose he must have had any priggishness taken out of him at college. Most fellows have."

"You know by experience, of course; yet I've seen some college graduates with conceit enough to sail an airship."

"Ha-ha! Have I got it as bad as that?"

"I didn't say you had, and Phil wasn't that sort either, when he was a kid."

"No? If he's anything like Uncle Eben he has plenty of self-esteem all right."

"I thought your uncle very modest in talking about himself. He has a fine quality of brain, anyway; and such a man may be pardoned a few eccentricities. Most men have them,— even you, Charles; like hanging your hat on a sofa pillow and mislaying the clothes brush. Where do you suppose I found it the last time you had it?"

"Under the doormat?"

"On top of father's portrait in the hall. I had to call Mattie to bring the stepladder in getting it down."

"That comes of being so small."

Mrs. Morley smiled condescendingly, and reverted to the news under consideration: "If Phil would bring a friend, we could be sure of couples for shows, dancing, and so on. No girl likes to feel that she is personally unattended, and a partnership business is even less satisfactory. You don't suppose Phil has a girl East, do you?"

"He may have; but we have had no notice of an engagement. Now I think of it, your letter stated the Wiltons have relatives in that vicinity. Possibly Phil has met the girl, Carol, somewhere in New England."

"It's not improbable,— there, or elsewhere; distances are trifling in these days."

"Well, shall I write Phil?"

"Don't tell him it's inconvenient, now. He would be disappointed, I'm sure; just tell him the whole story,— who the girls are, and that he may bring some one else if he thinks best. That ought to relieve us of responsibility as far as he is concerned. Then I'll write Sister Helen all about it, too, and tell her we shall be happy to entertain the girls."

"All right, that's settled, and I hope your conscience, ditto."

Mrs. Morley ate part of her muffin in silence. The news was suggestive of many things which did not, altogether, concern guests.

Mr. Morley, a well-built man of vivacious temperament, plainly expressed in a pair of handsome, dark brown eyes, was evidently enjoying his beefsteak and coffee, and had a look of complaisance which promised well for one of the suggestions, at least, and his wife resolved to make it known. She began cautiously, by calling to mind a suggestion of his own.

"I was just thinking of your Uncle Eben's house," she said. "They had been painting it recently, when we were there on our wedding-trip, — a leather-brown,— and it made such a lovely background for the green rosevines and honeysuckle. You remarked that when we had a house of our own you would like to have it that color."

"I had forgotten."

"Yes, and our house looked really pretty in the

straw color and white when we bought; but it needs painting again; and why not do it now, before the friends come? And, Charles, couldn't we have the bow window for the den we have talked of so often?"

"We might, perhaps."

"And a roof garden? I've thought how delightful it would be, over the east wing."

"An ideal place for lovers," laughed Mr. Morley; "I see you're expecting 'em."

Mrs. Morley smiled, but said seriously: "It's quite a responsibility taking in these young people."

"They are not children, I surmise, and are probably possessed of common sense."

"Common sense doesn't always count, though, in heart affairs."

"Intuition leads, eh? So much the better. Well, we will talk over this matter of repairs again this evening. I must be going to the office; expect a man to meet me at nine o'clock."

Mrs. Morley picked a raveling from the collar of his light overcoat as she helped him to adjust it, and when he was quite ready to start, bade him good-by with a merry heart. "Charles is a kind man," she thought, and caught herself humming songs all through the day. Because she was a happy wife, she permitted herself to imagine Carol and Ruby in a cozy pavilion in her new roof garden, with Cupid conveniently lodged at their elbows. And why not? Wasn't love the sweetest

thing in the world,— and the best? What if sometimes it did give people heartache? That should be better than to never know one has a heart that is anything more than a mere machine for pumping blood through one's veins.

The house was subjected to the throes of rejuvenation the very next day.

"'Twas ever so dear of you, Charles, to be willing to do so much to please me," complimented Mrs. Morley.

"I suppose I'll get a little good out of it myself," he answered, smiling.

"I hope so, surely; and so will all our friends," she replied.

For a few weeks the lady was strenuously busy, was obliged to decline various invitations to social functions and club meetings, and felt herself as closely confined at home as a seamstress, or the mother of several small children with no maid.

"But what of that? We have everything so prettily arranged at last, Charles," she said.

A neighbor called one morning when all was "spink and span" and Mrs. Morley conducted her over the place.

"It is perfectly grand!" she exclaimed. "And what a lovely Persian rug in the den!"

"Yes, it's the prettiest of its size I saw anywhere."

"You have such excellent taste, Mrs. Morley; but I want especially to see your roof garden. I

almost envied you when I saw Steve setting out the plants."

On the way up, the neighbor declared: "The only thing I miss over here is children running about and upsetting things. You should have seen my Jamie this morning. While I was 'phoning the grocery order, he stole into the cook's pantry and helped himself out of the egg basket. He sat right down on the floor and broke five, then stuck his fingers in the 'gavy' as he called it. I caught him lapping them off."

"A terror, isn't he? Do you suppose he would break eggs on my new rug? But he's awfully cute, and when you tire of him send him over here. I'll adopt him."

"I'll remember that."

As they reached the landing, the lady exclaimed: "What a *perfect place:* rustic chairs, settees, potted plants, climbing vines, and — the pavilion! Did you plan it all, Mrs. Morley?"

"Every bit."

Underneath the pavilion, on a cushioned seat, lay Pug, the family dog. Entering, the neighbor patted him, graciously, saying: "What a nice lounging place for him,— and for tired people, and lazy people!"

"And for guests. I'm expecting some soon,— quite a party."

"Do tell me about it."

"They are to be here —"

"Somebody's wanting Mrs. Doane at her telephone," shouted Mattie from below.

"Now isn't that always the way?" said the lady—"just when one is most interested in something else. But you'll come over. I shall want to hear about the guests, you know. Good-by."

Returning to her own home, she met Mr. Morley.

"Well, what do you think of the preparatory?" he asked, and seeing her puzzled look: "Did you ever hear, Mrs. Doane, of a woman expecting company who didn't think it necessary to rebuild and refurnish?"

"Ha, ha. It makes a good excuse, Mr. Morley, and most of us like a change now and then,—even the men. Mrs. Morley has done you proud."

"I guess you're right. She usually does," he acquiesced; "but don't tell her I said so. She is feeling quite vain already."

"Oh, no! I never tell secrets," laughed Mrs. Doane.

CHAPTER II

TWO OF THE PROSPECTIVE GUESTS

In the city of Boston, enjoying an evening at his club with a particular friend, sat "Phil,"— a tall, broad-shouldered youth of twenty-five. His face was ruddy with health, for he was a farmer's son. Benefitted in the years of his adolescence by the strict régime of the parental home, the effect of his early training had not been dissipated by college life. While reasonably studious, he had engaged in most sports permitted by the faculty, not to mention others of which they were supposed to have no definite knowledge. There had been private suppers in private suites, and evening functions where he had met fair maidens of Cambridge and the Back Bay, and of other localities of renown in and about Boston, besides many of other cities, who, as visitors at the "Hub," had been pleased to make the acquaintance of "Harvard Boys."

Several times, indeed, he had been half in love with a pretty face, or a sweet voice, or a pair of absorbing eyes; and once or twice, at least, he had imagined that his fate lay in the hands of some charming girl. But thus far the imagery wrought about the fair one had been dispelled, leaving him adrift on the Sea of Bachelorhood.

After completing the regular college and law courses, he had gone abroad on a business and pleasure trip with an elderly uncle; had seen all that most tourists see of London and Paris, of Lisbon and Madrid, of mountain and fen in Switzerland, of bustling Berlin and quaint old Amsterdam, of St. Petersburg, Naples, Venice and Rome. Furthermore, he had crossed the Mediterranean, sailed up the Nile, had a glimpse of sphinx and pyramid and of African marts, and a tour of Palestine.

He resolved that he would never forget to be grateful to this uncle with money and a talent for spending it, especially with so estimable a purpose as the education by observation of a nephew; and, too, that he understood and appreciated youth so thoroughly as to have exacted no more than good comradeship, permitting him to wander off at will wherever his fancy dictated, and to return with as small an apology for his absences as he chose to offer.

"I believe I can trust you, Phil; if I hadn't thought so, I shouldn't have asked you to come with me," he said, before they had gone far on their journey; and this remark, spoken with much sincerity, acted always as an incentive to good behavior. Consequently, the trip had been a supplementary school of no mean order, and the younger man had broadened mentally and socially.

Much that he had learned from books, he there

realized for the first time. Places that had been in his mind but little more than a name, became potent agencies in moulding memory-images and coloring his conceit. Art, in bronze and marble, on stretches of canvas, in frescoed galleries, on carven pillars, in fountains and magnificent palaces and grand cathedrals, took on a new and vivid form of existence. They emphasized the uses of development in mental and spiritual as well as in physical lines. The rhymes of Greek and Roman poets and the prose of ancient philosophers with which he was familiar enabled him the better to comprehend scenes in which they had moved and of which they wrote. Everywhere, amid the new of the old world, he saw ruins,— reminders of past centuries and their peoples,— kings and subjects, priests and peasants, noblemen and slaves, warriors and statesmen, artists, musicians, and literati.

Young as he was, and seldom inclined to moralize upon life's duties or pleasures, he had felt strangely solemn at times, and desirous of achieving for himself a name which should be considered worthy of perpetuation in the new world across the sea.

At present his face was not only ruddy with health, but glowed with a form of intelligence one likes to study. His features were well-balanced, brow overtopping chin evenly, and the nose, not too prominent, but giving firmness to the contour of the face; a fine mouth which might befit an ora-

tor; eyes blue, of a deep shade; eyebrows but slightly curved, and of an auburn hue matching the luxuriant growth of hair on the massive head.

The friend mentioned was a college chum, another athlete in point of size,— one who would be quickly noticed in a crowd of men by his *distingué* air. He was of the blond type, generous-hearted and a thoroughly likeable young man, despite the evidences of pride in his demeanor. His immediate forebears told of the blood of English royalty in their veins. It was natural for him to carry his head as if it were accustomed to a crown.

Phil, whose full name was Philip Winthrop Tracy, and this big blond, Hubert Marshall, had been intimate friends since the Freshman year at college. They had roomed together, eaten at the same table, pored over the same books, and played much the same games, though Marshall had excelled at rowing, while Phil had championed football.

Now they were planning a business partnership in some city not yet decided upon. Marshall favored the home city, Boston; but Phil was for pushing Westward, and had ever at his tongue's end, as an answer to Marshall's entreaties to remain where both were best acquainted, the time-worn advice of Horace Greeley to aspiring young men.

Sometimes Marshall would rebel and, forgetful of his inheritance, mutter a veritable swear-word; but it had small effect on the determined Phil.

This evening Phil had an inducement to offer, and did not mention Horace Greeley.

While the two were chatting amicably over their cigars, he made known the incentive to go West.

"What do you say to a trip to the Pacific Coast early in March, Bert?" he began.

"An investigating tour?" questioned Marshall, without enthusiasm and with the inception of a bored look about the eyes.

"Not at all. At least, not primarily. I have an invitation for self and friend at a cousin's in Los Angeles. There is to be a sort of house-party, I infer. Some acquaintances from Denver are to be there."

"Anyone we know?"

"I think not, but we could soon learn."

"Girls?"

"Well, yes, the Denver friends are young ladies. You see I wrote Cousin Charles that I intended going out to see the exposition,— probably in the early spring,— and would like to stop over in his city a few days."

"Ah, I see."

"One of the young ladies is sister-in-law's sister,— or some such connection,— of Cousin Charles's wife, and the other is a Miss Wilton."

"Wilton — Wilton. I've heard that name before, somewhere."

As a third member of the club, and an insistent one, approached at this juncture to make an appointment with the two for the morrow, Marshall

relinquished an intention of chasing his memory after a something which resembled a bird's song.

Later, when the intruder had departed, he caught it, as hunters say, on the wing.

"Phil, that Miss Wilton is an Illinois girl, I'll bet you a souvenir. I met her in Chicago a year or so ago, at a charity ball. Do you know if her intimate friends call her 'Carol'?"

"That happens to be her appellation; but this one lives in Denver, and Wilton isn't so uncommon a name. Don't feel too sure of yourself, Bert."

"I confess it does seem ridiculous, but I believe it is the same girl. Mighty bright! Makes one think of a nightingale, tuberose and ripe cherry, all in one. I had two dances with her and sat out a third. She can waltz and no mistake, hardly touched the floor at all, seemed to be swinging on air. Well, you may count on me, old man."

"Good! Then we'll call it done. I'll write Charles our acceptance. But look here, Bert, you will give me a chance to speak to her now and then, won't you?"

"Isn't there another? I understood you to mention a plural number."

"Yes, Miss Guild, Ruby Guild."

"Well, you have my full permission to converse with and to accompany Miss Guild whenever and wherever that young lady gives her sanction."

"Ha, ha! I foresee a bachelor in matrimonial ties. No doubt they will become you first-rate. But we must get out our 'shingle' previously."

"Can hang it in Los Angeles, can't we?"

"How about Boston?"

"'Go West, young man,— go West!'" Thus reiterating Phil's advice Marshall slapped him heartily on the shoulder; but to prove his sanity, demurred: "I guess the old 'Hub' will stand a pretty good show alongside of those California towns, Phil. Why, Los Angeles can't hold a candle to her in development. Look at our public buildings and higher schools of learning, our galleries of art, our parks, and our men of letters."

"Ever been to Los Angeles?"

"No. But one doesn't need to visit a place in these days to know all about it. Why, an author may go to our public libraries and read, then write up a story, or description of a foreign city,— just from the information derived,— which will actually excel anything its oldest inhabitant can relate; true in every detail, too."

"You just wait," responded Phil, dryly. "Furthermore, let me remind you of the old adage: 'Experience is the best teacher'; and I believe it will hold especially good in this case. Los Angeles is said to be enchanting of itself. Los Angeles, plus nightingales, ripe cherries and whatnot, with human form divine, the gift of fascinating speech, the glance of wonderful orbs which may convey a hundredfold more than word of mouth — and the play of soul,— which is more subtle and charming still than all else, because it may be felt rather than seen,— why, Bert, what

may we *not* find that is supreme: akin to the bliss of most elevated spheres,— to gods and goddesses?"

The cigars were burned low. Marshall tossed his into the near-by grate, and returned: "I'm going home. You are getting too much for me, Phil."

Nevertheless he waited for his friend.

At a considerably later hour the chums separated for the night. The old Tracy farm had been converted into a fashionable Boston suburb. Marshall's home was on one of its broad acres, Phil's, on another.

CHAPTER III

OTHER TWO AND A "THIRD PARTY"

"What shall we do with Patsy?"

"I repeat: What *shall* we do with Patsy?"

"If only we hadn't told him we should depend on him."

"If only —"

"Well, those two words belong to the regrettable and not to the needy side of the question. Please give me your unbiased opinion of the may-can-and-must-be's." And Miss Ruby Guild, sitting in front of the broad mirror of her dressing table, in her cozily appointed boudoir, brush in hand, held it idly as she spoke. Her long, dark hair hung loosely about her shoulders, which were enveloped in a pink-figured kimono; and her hazel eyes and the firmly set curves of her small mouth betokened a serious consideration of the subject named.

Beside her, on a cushioned window seat, sat her friend, Miss Wilton, dressed for calling. Her pretty blue, tailored suit of chiffon broadcloth, and her hat of blue velvet trimmed with ermine, brought out, in artistic fashion, the cream and cherry tints of her face, the wood-violet-blueness

of her eyes and the brown-golden hues of her fluffy hair.

"But you have known him so much longer than I," she answered. "Any shot of mine might fall short of the target."

"Do you think it would do to show him Mrs. Morley's letter?"

"It seems to me that would be like firing with the gun halfcocked."

"There! You see you can help me, after all. Now keep on your thinking-cap and give me some more ideas."

"I think I should make the information as impressive as possible by telling it with the aid of imagination."

"I should spoil it, my dear, but you could do it, Carol. You have so much tact. I seem to have none at all, when I need it most. And he is coming up this evening!"

Carol Wilton bit her red underlip slightly, and the next instant she laughed, in a soft, rippling way.

"May I come, too?" she asked.

"Oh, *will* you come? But you are invited out to the Pringhams', aren't you?"

"I'll send regrets. It's just an informal, anyway,— tell them it's a message from Boston, requiring immediate attention."

"Good! And you'll report to Patsy?"

"I'll help. Now please hurry, or we shan't get halfway around with our calls."

Quite unexpectedly, Mr. Guild brought home a friend from out of town to dine, and it was somewhat late when he departed, and Mr. and Mrs. Guild took up sheets of an evening paper in the library, leaving the living room to Ruby and Carol and the unsuspecting Patsy, who was no less an individual than Mr. Guild's junior partner in business, Mr. J. Burke Nicholson, a bachelor of Scotch-Irish descent. He was of medium height and weight, had bluish-gray eyes expressing honesty and friendliness, a rather long nose, flexible mouth, often compressed in moments of deep thought, but easily relaxed into smiles of good nature; a chin, indicating sufficient will power for all purposes of necessity, and hair just beginning to show iron-gray above the ears.

Mr. Nicholson had known Miss Ruby since her years were told in single digits, and had seemed much like a relative of the family during the later years of his connection with her father's business interests. Since she had finished school and had gone into society, he had often acted as her escort. His friendship had become more marked and the girl was beginning to resent what appeared to her to be almost a monopoly of herself. As a schoolgirl she had not been unwilling to accept occasionally his kind offers to chaperon her to places of amusement and to and from the meetings of her music club, or church. Now, she very much desired that he would not anticipate such privileges, especially as she was continually

making new and agreeable acquaintances among younger, marriageable men.

And this prospective trip to California! He had been invited to join the party by Dr. and Mrs. Merriman of Denver. Ruby and Carol playfully intimated at the time that if he accepted he would have to pay for the pleasures involved by "reading up" all places of prominence on the route, and later, conveying his knowledge to the rest of them. To this he had readily consented, and Ruby, at least, was fully aware that he intended to comply. She knew, also, that any retraction on her part would be likely to disappoint, perhaps to offend. She did not wish to offend and would be sorry to disappoint, because of his unmistakable kindness. But those "Boston fellows"! Going right to Mr. Morley's, too! What could be done with Patsy that would seem discreet? She had Phil in mind, particularly. He was young, cultured, traveled, and handsome. And Carol Wilton had not forgotten a charity ball in Chicago, where she had met a young Mr. Marshall of Boston, whose acquaintance she hoped to renew.

Ruby resolved to say nothing of the matter until Carol should first have introduced it to their visitor.

He was accustomed to their casual frivolity, and it disturbed him as little as the frolics of young kittens disturb a demure old cat. He was even used to the nickname Patsy, which title had

been assigned him on a St. Patrick's Day, when he had strongly upheld the devotion to that renowned saint, and presented each of the young ladies with a badge of green. But this evening, he was surprised by their seriousness and their formal "Mr. Nicholson." They had drawn chairs in front of the glowing grate, for the night was cool, and he was leaning comfortably against the cushioned back of a large rocker.

"You do look so contented, Mr. Nicholson," Carol said; "and it seems too bad to spoil a perfect present environment by assuming dim uncertainties, doesn't it?"

"It depends upon what the dim uncertainties promise," he answered.

"Oh, nothing like that big easy-chair by this delightful coal fire. I was just thinking what a prodigious undertaking it is to go away out on the Pacific Coast!"

"That's it, is it? Well, I don't know. I believe a man should be willing to sacrifice himself for the good of others, you know, to a certain extent, I mean. Of course, I expect to get some benefit personally out of the contemplated journey. It's a good thing to get away from business once in awhile, for instance."

"I fear you'll not be much benefitted, unless we release you from your promise to show us all the interesting sights, and tell us all about everything worthy of notice," interposed Ruby.

"It would be fatiguing, certainly, this keeping

your eyes open, *en route*, lest you miss something worth while; and furthermore, Mr. Nicholson, you are quite liable to have four on your hands, instead of two."

"Four?" curiously.

"Four," nodded Carol.

"Who are the superfluities? I had supposed it was all arranged."

"So we had supposed," she declared, with a brief display of dimples. "We learned differently to-day."

"The Merrimans at fault? Some other young people crowded themselves in, or what?"

"Not exactly crowded, I think, just happened in. They are not to start from Denver."

"Someone from somewhere else," said Mr. Nicholson, absently.

"Two from elsewhere," corrected Ruby, cautiously, too carefully, perhaps, for Mr. Nicholson with increased interest asked abruptly: "Two young chaps, eh?"

"Ah, you're guessing; but they do happen to be young men," conceded Carol. "They had planned to visit the Morleys, or one of them had anyway, before the Morleys knew of our going. He is a cousin of Mr. Morley, Mrs. Mack said. And Mrs. Morley wrote not to let it make any difference about our plans. They would be only the more glad to see us, as she knew she could depend on us to help entertain. We are wondering, Ruby and I, if these young men would think

it strange if we were off every day with our own party and didn't invite them to go along. They will be strangers there, like ourselves, you know."

"I — see."

"And if they should go all about with us, we should need to call upon you to help make it agreeable for them."

"What luck,— for the other fellows! You wouldn't rather go without me, of course?" doubtfully.

"No, surely not. Nevertheless, it would be a great deal to demand of you, to be a *Cicero* for so many strangers."

"Both strangers to you?"

"I met one of them once last winter just before I came here."

"And the other?"

"He is the cousin of Mr. Morley, and lives in Boston."

"Do you know the cousin, Ruby?" inquired Mr. Nicholson, with a turn of the head.

"Only by reputation. Mrs. Morley wrote he had lately returned from a trip abroad, and was looking for a business location."

"Incidentally a better-half, probably. Well, this chair is mighty comfortable. Guess I'll stay right here."

"And let us wander without a guide? We've depended on you, you know," and, in a sympathetic tone, "I wouldn't blame you though, a mite, if you stayed. It's a most unpromising pre-

dicament. We couldn't be rude to the Morley guests, now could we?" Carol's eyes wore a beseeching look, and Ruby's face was drawn into a pucker, as she gazed at the blazing coals. Carol was actually making it appear that if Mr. Nicholson went to Los Angeles he would need to become a martyr for their sakes.

"It would be self-denial with a vengeance, wouldn't it?" she pleaded.

"I should say so! Two young dudes, who, whenever I pointed to a lovely bit of landscape, would have eyes only for you two girls. I still think I had better resign."

"But we want you to go," averred Carol.

"Certainly," added Ruby.

"M-m-m-m-m, I see. If there were to be but one, I could stand it," he continued reflectively.

"You will promise not to back out, won't you?" persisted Carol.

"And let those two Easterners rake me over the coals?"

"Couldn't you endure that, if necessary, for our sakes? Besides, they wouldn't. We wouldn't let them if they wanted to. I would tell them you had been good to Ruby, a sort of protector, next to her father and mother, you know, *ever since she was a tiny* — little girl."

"Gracious, what a length of time!" he ejaculated, ironically, smiling at Ruby.

"It really is quite a while to have been a *protector*," she laughed.

"Well," he sighed, "I'll go with you to Los Angeles; but it isn't likely those Boston chaps will care for me as a cicerone, and it *is* likely they will be more than glad to tie up to a couple of pretty girls like you. I'll stop at a hotel as I planned at first, and give them full swing. But if, by any chance,— by any chance,— they should leave you in the lurch,— *in the lurch*, mind,— you can send me word and I'll come to the rescue."

"You *are* generous, Mr. Nicholson," said Ruby with feeling.

"To the Boston chaps," admitted Carol. "And you'll promise to call at the Morleys' to see us, won't you, Mr. Nicholson? We don't want the other fellows to think they are the 'only-onliest'."

"That will depend. And see here! If either one of you 'Mr. Nicholson' me again this evening, I shall go back on the whole agreement."

"Patsy," said Ruby sweetly, "you're awfully good and kind, and I'm going to ask Carol to sing 'The Duckling' for you in part payment. She does it the cutest you ever heard."

"Do," he said.

Ruby went to the piano and played a soft, little prelude, while Mr. Nicholson looked gravely at the fire.

Carol's voice, however, won his attention, and her manner was enchanting. The gravity of his countenance lessened, and when the song was

finished, his mouth had expanded into a pleased smile.

"Music hath charms. Have you another duckling piece?" he urged.

Carol sang again; then Ruby brought a dish of sweetmeats, and the trip to the Pacific Coast, if not forgotten, was but a faint background for nearer delights.

After Mr. Nicholson had left them, Carol, who had come to spend the night, said to Ruby, "It wasn't so difficult, after all."

"You're capital at conciliating, my dear," exclaimed Ruby. "But tell me! What if those young men *should* ignore us?"

"Why then, we have Patsy," answered Carol. "They won't, though," she asserted confidently, with a twitch of her red lips.

CHAPTER IV

WESTWARD, HO!

A Pacific Limited was speeding its many miles an hour toward the "Golden State." In one of the Pullman Palace sleepers, berths had been reserved for a party of seven from Denver, which consisted of Dr. and Mrs. Merriman, Mr. Winthrop,— a wealthy patient with "a belief" in impaired digestion,— Miss Winthrop, his sister, a lady of mature years,— the Misses Guild and Wilton, and Mr. Nicholson, all of whom were on board.

It was nearly nine o'clock, A. M. Ruby and Carol had emerged from the dressing room with freshened faces and graces, and were awaiting their turns in the dining car, talking gaily, meanwhile, with new acquaintances in the vestibule. When at length opportunity offered, the young ladies sought seats at one of the tables. Ruby was in advance, and Carol, as she entered, had a glimpse of her opposite-to-be. His face was entirely unfamiliar. She was ravenously hungry, and just beside her, on the table, lay a menu card. Ruby had found another.

"Baked apples and cream," she read: "Fish. Omelets. French fried potatoes —"

A waiter interrupted by placing glasses of water before them, and the conductor laid a pencil by Carol's card. Taking it up she consulted Ruby and proceeded to fill an order slip. That finished, she lifted her glass and sipped the water, — one, two swallows,— and then her eyes wandered toward sights beyond the car-windows. Half way she caught an amused look in another pair of eyes,— blue like her own. Her gaze became riveted on the face of the opposite nearest the window,— the straight nose, proud lift of the head, the blond hair were those of Hubert Marshall.

"Pardon the interruption," he observed, still smiling.

"I think you must have come in through the window and changed places surreptitiously with some one else," she answered soberly, and held out her hand across the narrow table,— a hand as pretty and delicate as a white-petaled lily, it appeared to Marshall. He was almost afraid of crushing it. Even the slight pressure he gave it seemed to extract fragrance,— lily or violet, he hardly knew which. In reality, the hand had recently been plunged in violet water; but anything so prosaic failed, for the moment, to enter the gentleman's mind.

"My friend 'Phil,'— Mr. Tracy, you know,— Miss Wilton," he said, turning toward the big auburn-haired seatmate.

Again Carol gave her hand.

"It is like meeting an old acquaintance, Mr. Tracy. We have heard pages about you."

"I hope they were well gotten up," replied Phil.

"Indeed they were, most properly . . . Ruby, your sister's brother-in-law's cousin,— is that correct? — and Mr. Marshall. Miss Guild, gentlemen."

Ruby followed Carol's example and shook hands.

"I had supposed that we knew every soul on this train, by sight. We were off at every stopping place yesterday, and everyone else, it seemed to us, was off, too," she said.

"We got on late last evening," Marshall acknowledged. "Came over from Salt Lake. Phil, here, has to be humored in his search for a business location, so we have been looking along the way. I think I shall have him cured of his passion before we are through with our journey,— unless he is bewitched at Los Angeles."

"I should have supposed that you might have found Salt Lake City attractive," said Carol, biting her lip.

"It did look as if one ought to be able to do a large amount of courting there, of one kind or another. The dissensions between Gentiles and Mormons keep things somewhat lively, it appears. But Phil said if we were to settle under the shadow of the Mormon Temple, where Mormon influence is in its stronghold, we might in time become polygamists, and it would cost more to keep sev-

eral wives in gowns and other apparel than we would be likely to make by means of the Gentile opposition. So we gave up the idea."

"Print gowns are inexpensive," suggested Ruby.

"Yes, if women would be satisfied with prints, the expense would be nominal," continued Marshall. "Unfortunately, polygamy has not destroyed the Mormon woman's taste for silks and jewels."

"One at a time is the rule, isn't it? First wife humored until the second wife steps in," said Carol, laughingly.

"Our Eastern-bred notions of chivalry prevented our delving into details, Miss Wilton," replied Phil.

Ruby gave this "Cousin Phil," as she had repeatedly heard him called, a glance of approval. He even exceeded her expectations. He had a magnificent physique, was well-groomed and had a sensible face, she concluded; not that she was uninterested in Marshall, but she had wanted particularly to like Phil.

Carol felt inclined to question further.

"No joking, Mr. Tracy, there's a State law against polygamy, isn't there, and a church manifesto, beside?" she returned.

"Yes, but I apprehend it's a case of inherited tendency," he answered. "A Mormon is probably as sincere in his convictions as a Hard-shell Baptist is in his. It is astonishing to what

lengths people will go to support their denominational prejudices. They become as much a part of us as our bodies. They are even closer than heartbeats, for there's an end to those; but our beliefs, or prejudices, or whatever you may choose to designate our adherence to sect, will quite possibly cling to us till we're well into the next sphere. These Mormons are making plenty of converts, right now, in this country and abroad. They're spreading like the proverbial green bay tree. Of that I am sure; and I hardly think it wise to treat them as a joke."

"Doesn't he make a capital pleader?" asked Marshall of Ruby. "If I were a Mormon in need of an attorney, I should like to employ Phil."

"Wouldn't he do as well for the other, the Gentile class?" she replied, semiseriously.

"I don't know. I have never heard Phil in a divorce suit. But to set aside a subject which I confess I took up rather frivolously, what a piece of good fortune it is that we are saved a formal meeting at the Morleys'. I've been dreading it all the way."

"Crossing the bridge before we arrive is usually a worry-trip, I believe. I've found it so," answered Carol. "But as the bridge in this instance has proved a myth, we might resolve to take flight in psychological airships and cut out the bridges in future. What do you say?"

"How would you manage if the airship should take a plunge?"

"Oh, the right 'make' never plunge, and I would be careful not to patronize the other kind."

"Some sort of a patent-right affair with a distinguishing mark, I suppose? You see I want to be sure about it," the questioner persisted.

"Well, no — and yes. Anyone may ride in it, or claim a right to it for that matter. It is patent only in the sense of being public and conspicuous, and doesn't need any special distinguishing mark, — same as a smile, or a sunbeam, don't you know?"

"Ah, thanks. And begging your pardon, lawyers are quizzers invariably, how may one know that the thing isn't a copy? These are days of imitation; besides, smiles differ,— some are deceitful,— and danger lurks in many a sunbeam."

"Tell him to use common sense in judging," suggested Phil, laughing.

"All right, I *will*," laughed Carol in turn, "and trust intuition," she added, smiling at Marshall. Then: "Do you expect to like California, Mr. Tracy?"

"Certainly. Why not? It is our American Italy, and most people I have met who have been there speak highly of it."

"And you have lately returned from the European Italy?"

"I came directly home from Palestine, though I visited Italy some time previously."

"Palestine! Think what is in store for us, Ruby."

"You'll have enough of it before you are through with him, Miss Wilton, I assure you," said Marshall. "He even talks of khans and catacombs in his sleep."

"So we may have fresher experiences than we had thought."

"Miss Wilton was abroad last year,— you might have met," said Ruby to Phil.

Waving his hand, he replied: "Here's to regrets that we were not aware of each other's proximity."

"But we may still compare notes," she said.

"Meanwhile, Miss Guild and I may mount the 'Angel's Flight,' or some other eminence in Los Angeles, to keep pace," suggested Marshall,— "that is, unless she wishes to compare notes, too."

"My trip abroad is prospective, and I should much prefer taking notes to comparing old ones," she answered lightly.

"Were you back before the war upset things so over there?" asked Phil of Carol.

"No, we were caught in Switzerland, and had some rather difficult experiences; but came out safely,— baggage and all,— fortunately. And yourself?"

"I returned early in the fall without any serious trouble. We were almost too far South for it then. The Turkish warships of the Golden Horn were comparatively peaceful, and British and French war fleets hadn't commenced churn-

ing the Mediterranean on their way to the Dardanelles."

"Didn't you almost wish you belonged over there, and were a captain of artillery, on land, or of a submarine, in the navy?" queried Ruby curiously.

"No, not over there. There's something courageous and fine about fighting where and when one feels it a duty; but when I am called to be a soldier, if ever, I hope it will be in a righteous cause. Nobody seems to know what the war is really about over in Europe. It doesn't look much more reasonable than the way they are going at it down here in Mexico. There seems to me to be considerable selfishness at the bottom of things."

"If there weren't, there couldn't be war," said Carol, as the waiter brought finger bowls, and returned order slips.

When bills were paid and tips left on the waiter's tray, Carol said to the young men: "We want you to meet our Denver friends. Though perhaps just now you would prefer cigars."

"Cigars can wait, eh, Bert?" answered Phil.

"To be sure. Any bachelors in your party?"

"Yes, two," answered Carol promptly.

"Can't you coach us a little?"

Lifting her left hand daintily with the right, she folded down the thumb and third and fourth fingers. Touching the uplifted first finger, she began a description, as follows: "The eldest,—

that is this one, you see,— is — oh, immensely wealthy; owns oil wells and copper mines and railroad stock and Denver real estate and an interest in several buildings —"

"Oh, spare us," exclaimed Marshall. "I observe a bridge to be crossed already. Please help me find the airship."

"His money doesn't concern him so much," she said, smiling, "as what he considers his functional disorders. So your bridge is another delusion; you won't even need to resort to an airship. This Mr. Winthrop is a patient of our Dr. Merriman, who is trying to infuse a hope of recovery into his mind. He's succeeding rather well, too. The doctor has great faith in the power of suggestion, don't you know; and it's very little in the drug line Mr. Winthrop gets."

"Well and good. If he is young, he will probably imbibe enough optimism to cure him."

"He lacks several years of being three score and ten. Besides human life is gaining on its limit. He may survive a hundred." Carol's eyes were luminous. Pointing at the slim second finger, she continued: "The other bachelor is, well — I really think I should leave a description of him to Ruby. He is her father's junior partner."

"Ah?" said Marshall, looking inquiringly at Ruby.

"Come and see for yourself. I presume we may find him in the observation car," she answered.

The bachelor in question was occupying a chair

at the extreme end of the drawing-room. Others of the party were in their own coach.

"We were looking for you, Patsy," said Ruby, familiarly. "We met these gentlemen in the diner. They are the friends of the Morleys whom we had expected to meet later on." Then followed a formal introduction.

"You are from Boston, I believe," said Mr. Nicholson.

"Not long since," answered Phil, "yet long enough to realize that we live in a pretty big country."

"Do you notice any difference in Western people?"

"A little, in some of them,— though I must admit that divisions according to points of compass have been largely guesswork. One meets mostly Easterners on these West-bound trains, and we find them wherever we go. Your Westerners have the reputation of being broad-minded, less conservative than our New Englanders, for instance."

"Well, you have fair specimens of Westerners in these young ladies here. You'll need to watch out for them. They have few equals in setting traps for the unwary."

"Oh, Patsy!" exclaimed Ruby, with a pretense of chagrin.

"Why, bless me! That's nothing against you. It's only another way of saying you're brainy."

"Then I beg your pardon," she replied.

"'Patsy,'" repeated Marshall. "That sounds exceedingly refreshing after so many days of traveling among strangers. It sounds homelike, too."

"So it does," agreed Phil. "I wish —"

But the wish remained unspoken, and though Carol, looking up quickly, interpreted it, she did not offer to bring about its realization then.

CHAPTER V

THE SURPRISE

Mr. Nicholson held a book in his hand, and Carol noticed that while talking with them he kept a finger on the page he had been reading.

"You are interested in that story,— don't let us disturb you, Mr. Nicholson," she said.

"It's something I picked up at the Salt Lake Station," he explained, "not so absorbing, though. Sit down."

"I think I would rather go outside," confessed Ruby. "There's more of this lovely air out there."

It followed that the four from the diner were soon seated on the rear platform, watching indolently the receding track and passing scenery, yet quite awake to mutual interests.

"Let me think,—" mused Marshall. "Didn't you tell me, Miss Wilton, when we met at that charity ball last year, that you were studying voice,— or was it something I learned from a friend of yours?"

"Quite possibly it was I, though I haven't any recollection of doing so," was the reply.

"Carol is a Nordica in disguise," declared Ruby, and Carol returned the compliment by saying: "And Ruby is splendid at the piano."

"Good, Marshall has his flute along," confided Phil.

"And Phil his guitar," said Marshall. "I surmise there is music in store for us all."

"Oh, and do you both play all kinds of accompaniments?" asked Carol, growing excited.

"Just a few, speaking for myself," answered Phil. "Marshall does better."

"You are hardly the one to judge," replied Marshall.

"You'll do, both of you!" exclaimed Carol, clapping her hands. "We'll teach you anything you may lack, won't we, Ruby?" and without awaiting Ruby's decision, she went on: "I have a most vivid recollection this minute of music I heard in Venice every night,— such *wonderful* music,— right under our windows, in the gardens, on the water, everywhere! Why can't we surprise the Morleys that way,— stop over a train, do something unexpected?"

"A capital idea, Miss Wilton," conceded Phil. "They would take it all right, and they aren't looking for us fellows to-day, anyway. Besides, I know of a costumer in Los Angeles,— used to be at Cambridge,— who could rent us some Italian outfits, say tambourines for you ladies, and anything else we should need."

"I suppose the Morleys will be at the station

to meet this train. Sister wrote we should be there this afternoon," said Ruby.

"Send a telegram," advised Phil. "I'll do it for you at the next station, if you say so."

"All right. I'll sign my name to it," agreed Ruby. "We might say: 'Met friends. Will stop off a short time,' or something like that."

"I presume we would better take our Denver friends into the secret, too. And shall we include Mr. Nicholson in the serenade?" As she spoke, Carol's lips parted in a smile which displayed her very even rows of white teeth.

Phil sought Ruby's eyes, and tried to read there if she had more than a friendly liking for this Mr. Nicholson, but he did not find them particularly communicative. Nevertheless, his youth forbade anxiety on that score. Both he and Marshall were inclined to believe that gentleman a sort of charitable individual, upon whom the two young ladies might wish to rely in an exigency.

Directly, Mr. Nicholson, tired of reading, sauntered out on the platform.

"We were speaking of you," said Carol, addressing him.

"So I surmised," he answered nonchalantly.

"I wonder if you would enjoy personating an Italian, in our contemplated troupe,— an Italian versed in English, who would act as an interpreter, and commend us to the Morleys. We are planning to surprise them by arriving late, and playing and singing at the door as mendicants."

"They'll enjoy that, no doubt; but I think you'll have to excuse me. I was never any good at trying to be somebody else, and besides, Dr. Merriman and I have an engagement for the evening. I'm sorry if it will inconvenience you."

Ruby had anticipated a little showing of jealousy, in spite of his declaration in Denver. Mr. Nicholson was acting very cleverly, if he were acting.

After lunch, the four made out their programme, sang for each other, taught each other melodies, all in a quiet way, and retired to their berths humming songs,— "just in time to pack up," Mrs. Merriman reminded them.

The train arrived at its destination promptly. Dr. Merriman had engaged rooms for the Denver party at one of the large hotels, and the young people who were to be guests of the Morleys accompanied them thither. Soon after, they went in search of costumes, Phil keeping close watch of passers-by, lest he encounter Mr. or Mrs. Morley. Fortune seemed to favor them, and they returned to the hotel laden with various packages, not wishing to wait for a messenger.

After dinner there was a rehearsal in Dr. and Mrs. Merriman's private suite.

"I wish I could see you act it all out at the Morleys'," said Mrs. Merriman, "but you will come down to-morrow, I hope, and tell me about it."

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Merriman, if we possibly can," answered Ruby.

It was half past eight o'clock, when, dressed in elaborate street costumes of Italian styles and laden with mandolin and tambourines,— the young men having been unable to procure their own instruments in time,— the belated guests left a taxi-cab at a near-by corner, and ascended the terrace steps to the Morley lawn. The house was brilliantly lighted, and through lace draperies a charming picture of the interior of a typical Los Angeles home was visible. The lower front rooms were unoccupied, and the four ventured along the cement walk at one side of the house, and hearing voices, looked upward, to find a mass of overhanging vines and flowers.

"A roof garden," exclaimed Carol, under her breath.

They listened a moment.

A woman's voice said: "Do you think we shall hear from them again to-night, Charles?" and a bass voice replied: "Possibly. We won't have to worry anyway. It isn't as if they had been delayed by a wreck."

"No, that would have been awful," said the other. "The cook had baked a fresh cake, but it will keep all right."

Below, there was suppressed excitement. Two girlish hearts beat forcefully beneath unaccustomed habits. Two gallant youths bade them take courage; then, a strain of melody arose to Mr.

and Mrs. Morley's ears, which quite astonished them,— so rich and deep, so sweet and weird it sounded on the evening air.

"Charles Henry! What does it mean?" she questioned eagerly.

"It's a serenade, evidently. Some of your friends have heard of the completion of your new roof garden and have come to help dedicate, perhaps," said her husband.

Again, a strange, sweet, Italian song from a throat made for music. It was Carol's voice, and Phil strummed an accompaniment on the borrowed mandolin.

Mr. and Mrs. Morley drew to the edge of the garden wall and looked down over the railing. Lights from below revealed dimly the strange faces and stranger garb.

A pair of slender hands held up an inverted tambourine. Would madam give "a leetle," to help the poor? They were wanderers, these four, and wanted to earn "monies" to pay their passage back to dear old Italy. No work such as they did at home could they find in this country. Very, very poor were they. Carol interspersed some broken sentences in Italian. Her voice was pathetic and bewildering.

Mr. Morley was puzzled; but a quarter wasn't much to lose. He threw one down to the apparently fair Italian, saying: "Do you know you are subjecting yourselves to arrest? But go ahead,— sing some more."

Carol complied, her voice tremulous with laughter; but the listeners on the roof thought it might be tears.

Once more the tambourine was lifted. "We so poor, so far from home," she pleaded.

Mr. Morley threw down another quarter, his wife protesting.

"I don't know how we could get more fun out of fifty cents," he said, without an attempt at privacy.

"Thanks, much,— indeed very much," said Carol, and encouraged by Mr. Morley's demeanor: "Would the kind *padrone* permit us to sleep one leetle night in the gareege,— costs so much monies for place to sleep. We *so* poor! No friends here, know nobodies!"

"Sleep in the garage? Oh, my man has charge of that. He is rather particular about his guests. But where did you learn so much English?"

"I was one time with lady in Naples. She Engleesh. She teach me."

"You are all brothers and sisters, I suppose, down there?" said Mr. Morley, his mouth twitching perceptibly in his efforts to keep back a smile.

"Yees, we brother and sister,— all of us."

"Well, go around in front of the house and I'll come down and have a look at you."

Perhaps Mr. Morley thought the menticants, — if such they were,— would sneak away before he could reach them; but they obeyed implicitly.

"Steve, see here," called the owner of the establishment to his man.

"All right, sir," came from the rear yard, somewhere.

"Did you hear that music just now?"

"I reckon I did. Mighty fine, I call it."

"Well, those musicians claim to be poor Italian travelers. They would like to sleep in your quarters to-night."

"*Sleep in — the — garage? Will you hear that?* — Earthquakes an' cinders! Why they'd be off with the machine before mornin'!"

"With you there to watch them?"

"Did you take notice of the size o' them fellers? Corbett and Sullivan, not to mention Johnson! The machine 'd be a goner, or there'd be a murder, sure,— likely both!"

"Don't think we'd better shelter 'em, eh?"

"No siree!"

"Well, I'll tell 'em you object."

"Better let me fix 'em," Steve muttered, loitering a moment.

At the front steps, just a little away from the glare of the lights, stood the pretenders.

Through the front hall came Mr. and Mrs. Morley, followed by a maid and Stephen. The gleam of a pistol was seen beneath the man's rough, right hand. Through a closed screen, Marshall caught sight of the weapon.

"Gad, girls, they are coming after us with a

gun!" he said in a whisper. "Off with the head-rigging, quick!"

In an instant the head gear was removed, except Phil's, which persisted in clinging.

Mr. Morley threw open the screen. Before him stood as charming a vision as human eyes may behold: a petite, graceful form, in soft rainbow-hued draperies; a face which reminded him vaguely of snowflakes and pink geraniums; a pair of grave, violet eyes, and a crown of disheveled, gold-tinted hair, glinting in the blaze of the porch light. A little in the shadow were other forms,— two, tall and straight as Indians, and one quite small, when viewed comparatively.

"I'm sorry," began Mr. Morley, "but Steve thinks we haven't any spare room in the garage. It wouldn't be comfortable for *you* there, anyway, if there were." And gazing curiously at the beautiful face: "It would be more appropriate in the house." Almost he guessed the truth.

"*What's that, Charles?*" interpolated his wife.

"You'll have to go to some lodging house, I think, unless you can induce Mrs. Morley here to admit you," he continued, smiling.

Ruby stepped out from the shadows.

"Oh, Mrs. Morley, don't you remember me? We met among the Rockies, not so many months ago."

"*Met — you? — Why — why — Charles Henry,*" she cried. "It's Ruby!"

Stephen with his pistol was close at hand. He had his eyes on the tall figures beyond, shaking with laughter behind the rosevines.

Mrs. Morley rushed down the steps and clasped Ruby tightly in her arms. "Oh, you dear little witch," she laughed, as she kissed her affectionately.

"And here is Carol, Mrs. Morley," said Ruby; and pointing to their companions: "There are your Cousin, Mr. Tracy, and his friend, Mr. Marshall. We met on the train, quite unexpectedly, — and, well,— can you take us in?"

"*Charles Henry,— would you* — COULD *you have believed it?*" Mrs. Morley exclaimed breathlessly, as she greeted each in turn.

"Well, bless me!" said Stephen with his forefinger on the trigger of his pistol.

"Go and shoot yourself, Steve," commanded Mr. Morley, laughing, as he caught sight of the weapon for the first time.

But Stephen made no reply, as he retreated with the maid to the kitchen, where, with the cook, they talked for an hour,— in unison with the party in the living room,— of a foiled tragedy; the difference being that in the latter place there were frequent peals of ringing laughter.

CHAPTER VI

SIGHT-SEEING

"Everything is so perfectly delightful about it all! How can you ever bear to leave your home to go anywhere, out of town, I mean? You ought to feel quite satisfied, and very happy," said Carol to their hostess, after a partial tour of the premises next morning.

"Wait till you see the roof garden! That is the crowning point. We'll go up right away," answered Mrs. Morley.

The invitation included Ruby and Carol. They had left the men of the party enjoying morning papers, cigars, and easy chairs on the wide, front porch.

Pug was already comfortably stretched on the cushions of the pavilion.

"Such laziness!" exclaimed Mrs. Morley, as he blinked at them sleepily; and after a series of pats on his small, brown skull, she pushed him somewhat unceremoniously aside. At this, he winked apologetically, and wended his way toward an isolated corner.

"Have seats, girls," she urged, re-arranging the cushions.

"Pug shows good sense in choosing this place

for his naps, Mrs. Morley,— quiet, lovely draperies and pillows, flowers, palms, and sunshine to view. I shall want to be lazy too, every day," volunteered Ruby.

"Call me 'Ida,'— both of you. I don't like formality among intimates, at least not much of it. But you mustn't expect to have a great deal of time all to yourselves. There will be trips and trips, and with those young men to share them with you, your opportunities will be too good to waste."

"Thank you, Ida. I imagine the men will like best to go off hunting by themselves, or fishing, as the mood takes them. Women are considered something of a bore in traveling. Aren't they?"

"Confess that you believe they couldn't be hired to go without you, girls, if they supposed you would enjoy going in their company, and would be willing to rough it a little, as they like to do; and that it is no secret with you, that a pretty girl moves a man at her will as she would an automaton."

"Even without much brains?" said Carol, amusively.

"Without *displaying* too much," laughed Mrs. Morley. "It's proverbial that men prefer as a wife a woman of unaffected simplicity,— unsophisticated, except in domestic concerns, which she is at liberty to elevate to the top-notch of superiority. I've little fault to find as far as I am personally involved; but in any case, one mustn't

expect to be perfectly contented and always happy. It is quite too much for mortals to hope for. If either of you win as kind a husband and one who provides as well as Charles, you may be thankful. *He* thinks Phil and his friend are *exceptionally* nice men."

"I believe they are,— if one may trust appearances. I had my faith somewhat shaken in college men when I was among them,— a 'co-ed,'" declared Carol, seriously. "Such goings on as were had right under our very eyes: the boys acted as if they suspected we were blind to their follies. Our 'frat' houses were not far apart, don't you know, and,— oh, dear! — I almost thought that if ever I married, it must be to a man especially made for me."

"Perhaps this same familiarity with the shortcomings of our brothers has made some of us more particular and discreet in our final choice. But you know, dear, we women have our failings, also, and it will hardly do for us to be stubborn in our prejudices. And to be personal, I'm sure you won't allow yourself to be prejudiced against Phil and Marshall."

"I'm determined I won't be. In fact, I was hardly thinking of them at all, when I spoke of marrying."

"I should suppose not," said Ruby.

"They are of fine old families,— that means a great deal," suggested Mrs. Morley.

"And quite possibly engaged," added Ruby.

"I think not. Phil acknowledged as much to Charles, last evening, and said it was very thoughtful of us to plan such delectable things for them."

"The excitement acted as a tonic, perhaps."

"Especially Steve's part," laughed Carol.

"Poor Steve," deplored Mrs. Morley. "He was so ashamed of that . . . Now I'll run down and give some orders, and if you girls will put on your street suits, we'll go for a drive by and by. I think Charles means to take the men down to his place of business, and you wouldn't be specially interested in farm implements, I presume."

"Anything you say will be all right for us, Ida, the drive would be fine," consented Ruby.

"Splendid!" said Carol. "But I must write a line home, so I'll go right down stairs, too."

"And I," said Ruby. "I wish we might use a long-distance telephone, instead. I wonder if any one will write with a pen when such messages become common."

"Oh, yes, 'lest we forget,'" quoted Carol.

The Morley car, with Steve at the wheel, started briskly down the avenue, about mid-forenoon. Mrs. Morley directed the drive over several miles of beautiful streets in the Westlake district, including broad Wilshire Boulevard. On all sides were charming homes, a commingling of wood and cement, and of red and gray stone. Many were decorated with stucco work, others painted in hues that were borrowed of the flowers, and not a few

were grandly patterned after English and Old Colonial homes; looking much like huge snow-houses, in coats of glistening white.

Everywhere were enchanting lawns which held almost every conceivable flowering shrub and plant, luxuriant in growth and marvelous in beauty. There were borders of calla lilies, hedges of gold and scarlet cannas, orange lantanas, tall red and pink and white geraniums, feathery heliotrope, and magnificent roses! Blue myrtle and nasturtiums were imbedded at the feet of graceful palms, whose corrugated trunks were wound about with ivies and smilax and asparagus ferns. The sweet-scented jasmine, bougainvillea and other vines, laden with myriads of blossoms, climbed over porches and walls; clung to cement and clapboard and shingle; great scarlet-leaved poinsettias and fluffy red bells of hibiscus, tossed at the tips of their slender stems, against backgrounds of pearl and canary, dove-color, olive and deep wine.

Trees and blossoming vines thrived between pavement and curbing. There were the towering eucalyptus, spreading magnolia, the acacia, camphor tree, and the willowy pepper with its drooping sprays of fine, white flowers and of blood-red berries, amid the dainty green of tiny, clustering leaves.

In the distance, northward and westward, were the mountains: the ragged, snow-capped peaks of the Sierras, over the lower green of the foothills, like an artist's dream. The glow of dazzling sun-

shine pervaded all, and the mild, fragrant air was like that of June in New England.

"It is wonderland!" cried Ruby, delighted beyond measure.

And Carol said: "One can easily imagine elves and fairies at work at the roots of things."

"We will drive around Westlake Park, Steve," said Mrs. Morley, as they neared the place on the homeward drive.

Various persons were lounging in the pavilions, on benches under the trees, or idly rowing on the lake, where were hundreds of ducks and several large white swans. The trees and flowers, the bright green of the well-kept turf along the pathways, and the sunlight filtering through leafy spaces, made the place seem Elysian.

Later, on the same day, automobiles carried the whole party,— including the Denver friends from the hotel,— over other portions of the city, down South Figueroa Street and up West Adams, through St. James Park and Chester Place, where were many more elegant homes, and a wilderness of flowers and waving palms and playing fountains; out on the heights, too, among palaces and towers and pergolas and terraces copied from those of Italy, Spain, France, Switzerland, China, Japan, and India,— in truth from all the world, for the residents of the city are cosmopolitan, and have sought this sunny land for health, or wealth, or happiness, and, perchance, have found all combined.

Over paved boulevards, the party rode to Venice, which they explored on foot, agreeing that it was another Coney Island. On, through lovely Santa Monica by the placid Pacific, they went to Beverly Hills, where stands a far-famed hostelry amid a sea of blossoms; then back, via Hollywood,— nestled among the hills,— once the home of Paul de Longpre, honored as the world's most famous painter of flowers.

"I only wish you might have seen his garden," said Mrs. Morley to her companions in the car. "It was just *beautiful* — and his studio! Too bad everything has been changed and turned over to ordinary use. I think the people here should have made it a permanent home of art."

The sun had set and dusk was drawing on, as they rode into Los Angeles.

"Quite a change in the atmosphere," remarked Phil.

"Yes," replied the host, "no warm nights here to bother one, even in summer. Best ever for sleeping — and surprises. Any more on hand, Phil?"

"Can't tell what may develop," answered Phil, wisely. "One thing surprises *me*, right now, and that is your roads. I had no idea they were so grand."

"Oh, we aren't so far behind the times, if we are on the edge of the world," said Mrs. Morley.

Rather oddly, another surprise awaited Mr. and Mrs. Morley as they were passing through the

lower rooms, fastening doors and windows, preparatory to retiring for the night. A sharp ring was heard at the door-bell.

"Some one trying to find a number in our vicinity, I suppose," said Mr. Morley, proceeding to open the front door.

He was confronted by a messenger with a telegram, and as he opened the ominous yellow envelope, he speculated on its contents, but was far from guessing the truth. When spread out between his fingers, he lifted his brows, then lowered and slightly contracted them.

Dismissing the messenger, he carried the dispatch to Mrs. Morley and informed her brusquely: "It's from Aunt Lucinda. She's coming."

Mrs. Morley smiled as she read it over, and answered: "'It never rains but it pours,' you know, Charles."

"She'll reign all right, and pour, too, if you'll let her. There wasn't a woman in New England I so dreaded to see when I was a boy. Her periodical visits at our house turned things pretty generally upside down. She seemed to have a grudge against me, *because* I was a boy, I presume, and apt to be a little careless about things. If she saw me idle about the house for a few minutes, she would say to mother: 'Sary, ain't yeou got suthin' for that boy to dew? If he was mine, I'd set him to sproutin' potaters, or shellin' beans, and if I hadn't any o' them on hand,— why he could be pilin' up *stuns*.' She believed in early

marriages to keep young people busy with something besides foolishness, and she picked out a wife for me before I was twenty,— a sallow-faced girl who, so she said, had never been to theater nor a dance in her life, and who was always at prayer-meeting, storm or shine. I told her I knew there must be something out of whack with a girl that had such a complexion. She must be either a hypocrite or an ignoramus."

"How dare you?" laughed Mrs. Morley. "But your aunt wasn't much better pleased with your choice than you were with hers, if reports are true. We will make her welcome, though, and perhaps she may change her mind."

"When did she ever say anything against you, Ida?"

"Oh, at our wedding. She remarked that Charles's wife carried her head like a woman she knew in Coventry, and she guessed Charles would find she'd pull pretty strong on the bit."

"Ha, ha! She struck it right that time; but I'm not sorry you're that sort, wifey. And, say, I've a plan for to-morrow. We are all going somewhere; if Aunt Lucinda arrives of course she will need rest."

"Perhaps she will wish to go somewhere *with us*."

"We'll tell her it wouldn't be prudent. She might get overdone."

"Why, Charles,— you're — really, you don't mean to be inhospitable?"

"Not a bit. The house shall be at her disposal while we are away."

"Just leave her to me, dear. I'll manage someway."

"Put her up in the attic with the cook, make a bed on the roof, give her our room and we go to the neighbors, or what? — And you'll warn the maids?"

"Yes, I'll tell them she's coming, of course. But what *would* she have said to the doings last evening? Seriously, though, I'll send Mattie home to sleep for a few nights. Her people live on a car line and she won't mind going. Then I can arrange her room for your aunt. I'm glad it's such a pretty room,— new blue paper, you know, and the daintiest, dotted Swiss curtains, bedcover and stand drapes, and a new blue rug to match the walls."

"Here's to luck!" said Mr. Morley, pouring a glass of water from a silver tankard and passing it on to his wife. "But, Ida, I'll bet she'll quit us as she comes, the same woman I knew in New England when I wore top-boots and overalls. She has made it her boast that nothing short of solemn duty could induce her to change her style of dress, her language, or her religion. 'Remove not the old landmarks' was a favorite adage, and her landmarks were all laid among the rocks and huckleberry bushes where she was born. She is provincial to the last degree!"

CHAPTER VII

THE ARRIVAL OF AUNT LUCINDA

"I do hope Mr. Morley's aunt likes young people," said Ruby, as she settled herself comfortably in the roof garden with a copy of colored illustrations of buildings and grounds at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition.

"She probably does, or she wouldn't be coming to visit the Morleys," answered Carol. "But we shall not long be left in doubt, if the train is on time."

"No, and instead of speculating on the lady's likes and dislikes, you would advise studying up the exposition scenes, wouldn't you? Here, I'll be generous and let you look over. They say it's simply magnificent! I hope we can stay long enough to make it worth while."

For a few moments the booklet proved absorbing, then Carol's eyes caught a cartoon on a magazine page spread out at her feet which represented "Uncle Sam" as patting a favorite son on the back for one of his creditable performances.

"Don't you sometimes wish you were a 'favorite son,' Carol?" Ruby asked abruptly, following Carol's gaze.

"No," said Carol, looking up quickly. "Think of the pretty clothes we may wear, for instance.

Would you exchange your lovely party gowns for a suit of conventional black and stiff linen accompaniments such as men wear?"

"But *do* acknowledge that most men have more freedom than we," replied Ruby, amusively.

"A man may propose marriage, which is an act denied to us; but we have the right to reject his offer, which is by far the greater privilege," submitted Carol.

To which Ruby responded: "A shrewd man wouldn't propose marriage, unless he were reasonably sure of acceptance, I should think."

"Oh, but they do — sometimes. Girls will draw a man on," and with half hidden mischief lurking about lips and eyes, Carol explained: "I'm not meaning to be personal, my dear, and I'll confess it *is* difficult to comprehend —"

Involuntarily she stopped, as her ears caught the sound of footsteps on the stairs,— heavy footsteps they were, and from more than one pair of feet.

"What is it that is so almost impossible of comprehension?" asked Phil, directly, peering over the railing at the top.

> "'When from the earth the animals
> Went off the boat in pairs,
> Who was it that first heard the sound
> Of boots upon the stairs?'"

quoted Carol, recovering herself.

"I'll give it up," he said after a little reflection.

"I've never been able to guess, myself," she told him. "But I wish I could,— I might win fifty pounds, so the author said. Maybe he's dead by this time. It was a good while ago."

"That's the usual luck. But who would have thought you girls would have been sitting here propounding such conundrums to each other?" he continued, winking at Marshall.

"How long were you standing on the stairway, just out of sight?"

"Oh, we came right up."

"Sure?" she queried, while Ruby generously offered seats, and presented the real question under discussion: "Which sex has the more privileges?"

Phil, replying, declared: "I can answer that immediately. A woman has all the privileges when she is around; a man's come in when she is absent; but as that seldom happens, the woman has the 'lion's share.'"

"I think that could hardly be called an impartial statement, Mr. Tracy," replied Carol. "Men may vote in all our states, while women have equal political rights but in part."

"True. But isn't that because most women incline to domestic rather than political privileges?" he continued. "Now I honestly believe, when women lack rights and really want them, they find a way to get them, just as men do."

"Men would use combustibles to win, and women tractables, I suppose," interpolated Ruby.

"Acknowledge you couldn't do much with tractables,— which I take you to mean is moral suasion,— if guns didn't pave the way," said Marshall, who had remained standing.

"First destruction, then construction," observed Carol.

"Well — yes; but only because the destructive method is also the constructive, as for instance in our war with Spain. It destroyed much property and some lives; but it conserved the best interests of Cuba."

"That was the idea of some of our English sisters, to be sure. And wasn't it lovely of them to drop all their plans for women's rights and work so loyally for the English men as soon as *they* began to fight?"

"Wonderful, equal to the 'short cut' to 'Tipperary'!" said Marshall; and Phil, shaking his head solemnly, added: "Mrs. Pankhurst and all the rest of the militant suffragists over there will certainly deserve to share the pie half and half — if there is any left when the war is over," and, smiling at Carol, he admitted: "I really think they will be entitled to about two-thirds. They are not only brave, but they have shown themselves to be unselfish and generous in the extreme; besides, their faith in their men should command respect in return."

"Good for you!" exclaimed Carol, and as his eyes roved over the garden: "Isn't it pretty fine up here?"

"I should say it is. I wouldn't mind spending the forenoon, if we might; but we came up to deliver a message. Charles has planned a picnic at Eastlake Park, and Ida has consented to go and take lunch along, if you girls say so."

"*Oh, we do,*" they agreed.

"I wonder if I may have a flower," said Marshall, walking toward the railing.

"There's no one to say you 'nay,'" answered Carol, and obligingly she broke off a spray of pink ivy geranium and fastened it to a revers of his coat, then stepping back, she complimented: "That is quite smart."

"The flower, or its effect on the coat?" he questioned.

"Both," and turning quickly, she saw Ruby gathering violets.

"Those go beautifully with auburn hair," she suggested.

"No reflections cast on auburn hair, I hope, Miss Wilton," said Phil, deprecatingly.

"By no means. I think auburn hair is glorious! I have often wished my own were that color," she responded.

"*Do — you — hear — that,* Phil?" asked Marshall.

"Guess I do. You'll have to dye yours, now, Bert, sure."

"Oh, his is all right. He wouldn't look well with auburn hair," said Ruby, presenting the violets to Phil and smiling upon Marshall with her

brown eyes, which if less bewildering than a certain pair of blue ones, closer by, were honest in their expression, and Marshall thought Miss Guild improved by acquaintance.

The four were grouped about the piano in the living room when Mr. Morley came with Aunt Lucinda, who was, in reality, a sister of his paternal grandfather. They were apprised of her presence by Mr. Morley, and turned to meet a tall, thin-visaged woman, evidently not far from fourscore years of age, yet betraying the energy of one much younger. Her gray hair was still abundant, and worn in the old-fashioned corkscrew curls at the side, and a tightly wound knot at the back, beneath her black bonnet. Her eyes were dark and keen. She was gowned in a dull black alpaca, without trimming, and she carried a black alpaca bag, a black-handled umbrella, and a shoebox, carefully tied with white tape. Mr. Morley was burdened with a heavy gray camel's-hair shawl and an antique satchel.

"I'd no idee yeou had sech a family, Charles," she exclaimed, as the gentleman disposed of the baggage, piece by piece, on the floor and table. "I s'posed yeou and Ida wuz all alone, and I had sech a good chance tew come eout, along with the Seldens. Miss Selden's mother wuz a second or third cousin,— I d'n'no' jest which,— tew yeour grandfather, on yeour mother's side. She wants tew call on yeou afore she goes back East. They stopped off at Phœnix, in Arizony, a spell."

"Ah, ha?" assented the host.

"It's a great deal like comin' tew 'Kingdom Come' tew ride 'way eout here. I'm pretty good at gettin' 'reound Coventry and Bolton Notch; but I'd never 'a' ventured eout here by myself, though I've heerd so much abeout Californy, I've wanted to see it this good while."

"It's well worth coming to see, Aunt Lucinda," declared Mr. Morley, "and Phil, here, has just come from Boston to see it, too. He's Uncle Eben's boy, you remember."

"Yeou *don't say?* I knew Eben when he wuz fust married and a livin' on his farm. He's made a fortune by it, sence, I've b'en told, a sellin' it off fer city lots."

Phil smiled good-naturedly.

"I guess mebbe yeou'll help spend it," she went on, addressing him.

"I'm going to try to make a fortune for myself," he answered.

"Yes, I guess so. That's the way most young men talk. But they gen'ally find it handy tew have a rich father tew fall back on." Surveying the apartment, she said to Mr. Morley: "Yeou've picked up consid'able, Charles. I guess you ain't had much help from *your* father. Henry wuz never very good at managin'. Sary had most o' that tew do. If Henry *wuz* my nephew,— my own brother's son,— I'll say that fer Sary. She had the Tracy head fer managin'."

Again Phil smiled. "Aunt Sarah is a 'jewel of the first water,'" he agreed.

"Sit down, Aunt Lucinda, and I'll call Ida," said Mr. Morley. "She'll show you where to lay your bonnet and things."

"I s'pect I'd better go with yeou tew find Ida. She's prob'ly in the kitchen, ain't she, think? It must take her pretty much all the time tew look after this heouse and all the fancy fixin's, tew say nothin' abeout the cookin'."

"Oh, she has help, two maids, aunt. I go on the principle that a man who can afford to hire help in his place of business should be able to hire help for his wife about hers."

"That's sensible, neow. I kinder thought she'd have a hired woman, or I don't know as I'd durst come to see yeou." As she spoke, Aunt Lucinda made an effort to draw her handkerchief from her alpaca bag; but the strings had become entangled. Carol quickly sprang to her side and, kneeling on the floor beside her, soon untied the knotted ribbons.

"Don't you think Mr. Morley's house is lovely?" she asked, as Aunt Lucinda muttered her thanks.

"I don' know as I'm any jedge. I never did go much on statews and ile paintin's an' carved furnitewer. You see I wuz brought up plain. I wuz thinkin' jest neow what a lot of Bibles an' spellin' books an' decent clothes the money it cost would buy for the heathens over in Chiny and Indy and

the Philippines. But that's jest my way o' lookin' at things, and I ain't sayin' I'm always right." And Aunt Lucinda gave the girl a smile meant to be pacific, as she turned to follow Mr. Morley.

Mrs. Morley was actually in the kitchen, preparing the picnic luncheon. After greeting the visitor cordially, she invited her to join the party going to Eastlake. "Though if you are tired, Aunt Lucinda, you're quite welcome to stay here and rest," she suggested. "I'll go up-stairs with you right away and show you where you are to sleep, and Charles will take up your things."

"I'm some tired, I confess, and I guess I'll clean up a little and lie deown awhile if you're willin'. I don't want tew upset none o' yeour plans."

Mrs. Morley was gracious, and when Aunt Lucinda, whose surname was Dobbins, had seen the pretty blue room and had been offered a handsome blue silk kimono in which she might rest at her ease until her trunk arrived, she began to think that if Charles's wife *were* "sot in her way," there might be a worse way after all.

"It will seem kinder good tew get off this old alapaccy dress I've wore pretty nigh onto a week. It's a dreadful long way across Ameriky!" she said.

"Indeed, it is!" affirmed Mrs. Morley, laying a fresh magazine on the little stand by the window. "Perhaps you will want to read by and by; and I'll have Mattie bring you up a nice lunch, if you don't care to go down to the dining room. We

want to make it as pleasant as we can for these young people, you know, so we are taking them out; but we shan't stay late, and I hope you'll be quite comfortable while we are away."

"I'll get along all right; but I wouldn't mind havin' a 'Missionary Herald' tew look over, if yeou have one. I come away afore the last copy wuz eout."

"Yes, I have one. I'll bring it in," answered Mrs. Morley, congratulating herself on a recent subscription for the monthly, given to a neighbor interested in missionary work.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PICNIC AT EASTLAKE PARK

The trip to Eastlake Park was not through the most attractive portions of the city, from an æsthetic point of view; but gave one an idea of its resources and of its remarkable growth. There were large factories, many lines of railroad, wholesale and retail houses and a few battered adobe buildings, which must have witnessed the primitive glory of Spanish priest and soldier, and of the early days of conquest, when Fremont, "The Pathfinder," raised under near-by hills his country's far-famed banner of stars and stripes.

Arriving at the park, laden with bundles, baskets, and wraps, they alighted from the Morley car and crossed to the central gateway.

"Why, there is Patsy!" cried Ruby.

"And Dr. and Mrs. Merriman and — everybody," finished Carol.

"Now, who are surprised, I wonder?" asked Mr. Morley.

"I think you have the game on us, Charles," Phil replied.

By this time they had reached the bridge over the park lake, and just beyond, on a grassy plot

shaded by tall trees, met their acquaintances. Among them was a young stranger whom Mrs. Merriman introduced as Miss Tolmy, of Virginia.

"Wasn't it odd," she remarked subsequently to Ruby and Carol, "that she should happen along just as we did, and locate at the same hotel? I knew her mother when I was a girl. We went to a school in Baltimore together. Mrs. Tolmy is a widow and wealthy, and is traveling with her daughter and maid. She felt too tired to come with us to-day."

"It was odd,— their coming while you are here; but we have had a similar experience at the Morleys'. Mr. Morley's great aunt, whom he hadn't seen for years and years, came way from Connecticut, just before we started over here. She is so quaint,— like a picture from Revolutionary history. We expect to find her extremely interesting,— Ruby and I."

"I want you girls to call on the Tolmys. They are worth cultivating," said Mrs. Merriman.

Meanwhile, Mr. Nicholson was exerting himself to be agreeable to the stranger, as Ruby particularly noticed.

The company went first to the greenhouses filled with a choice collection of rare plants from many climes; then, to view the animals varying in size from a small monkey to a large bear. They watched a pair of huge bears in a paw-to-paw tussle, fed the monkeys, admired the wild-cats, the Angora goats, the sleepy owls and the birds of

paradise; and like schoolgirls and boys, set free from their tasks, the younger ones of the party patronized the merry-go-rounds and swung in the hammock chairs.

At length appetites began to be in evidence and the ladies proceeded to spread a most palatable lunch on a white cloth, over a stationary table; while the gentlemen made themselves useful in opening cans and carrying water, coffee, and lemonade from a café across the way.

Carol found a seat at table next Miss Tolmy. She was anxious to learn of the girl's capabilities. On the other side of the young lady sat Mr. Nicholson, still attentive. Ruby had Dr. Merriman at her right, and Marshall, who had been lending his aid in filling various drinking glasses with distilled water, sat at her left. Phil asked Carol's permission to take a vacant seat beside her.

All ate and talked and laughed and ate again, until Dr. Merriman declared that he should need to write out a wholesale prescription to prevent the nightmare. Even the dyspeptic patient, Mr. Winthrop, had forgotten his ills, and was, according to Miss Winthrop's judgment, eating quite indiscriminately.

Carol had made Phil welcome and now turned to Miss Tolmy, who was tall and very blond,— even fairer than Carol. Her eyes were light blue, and her features reminded one of an old miniature — regular and beautiful, expressing evenness of temperament, a placid, easy-going nature.

"You are from Virginia, Miss Tolmy, Mrs. Merriman told me," said Carol. "I have often wanted to visit some of the old battlegrounds there. The nearest I have been to them was at Annapolis. I was there with mama when the Prince of Battenburg was over."

"Oh, were you? I was there then too with my aunt, who was the wife of a lieutenant. Of course I was quite small, but auntie allowed me to go with my cousin, who was in the naval academy, to see some of the grand sights. I remember thinking it lovely,— so many sailors and fine officers in uniforms and big ships and parties for both sexes. Auntie permitted me to dance a little,— not nearly so much as I would have liked. My cousin is an officer on one of our battleships now."

"That is fine. Don't you wish we might see them all in the harbor here as they were a few years ago? There's nothing quite equal to a party on shipboard. And the big guns! Didn't you love to hear them boom?"

"Not — so — very — well. They make me a bit nervous."

"Were any of your relatives in the civil war of the sixties?"

"Yes, my grandfather and a great uncle. They were Union men," she urged, evidently fearing a collision unless the patriotism of the family were exposed.

"Weren't your ancestors greatly annoyed by having soldiers all about, Union and Confederate?

And didn't they pry into your grandfather's domains?"

"Yes! Grandma has told me that she spent many a night in fear of them. For awhile she had only one old manservant for protection. Raiders carried off hams, and cider, and fowls, and one night a fine horse and a saddle were stolen. You could hardly believe it, but after the war it was returned, secretly, with a note, saying the horse had been killed and they were sorry. It was just signed 'Yours truly, with thanks.'"

"Wouldn't you give a hundred dollars to know who sent it, and another hundred for a diary relating his experiences while the horse and saddle were in his possession?"

"I believe grandpa would. But I,— I don't know that it makes much difference to me. Grandpa has willed the saddle to my boy cousin in the navy."

"Ha, ha," laughed Carol. "I can imagine him ripping it up to find anything that may have been tucked away in the lining. Wouldn't it be great to find some very important message, which might have changed the whole order of things?"

"Perhaps, if it didn't stir up more trouble. I don't like to think of it."

"Miss Tolmy doesn't believe in war," vouched Mr. Nicholson, overhearing.

"Nor I,— when it can be avoided," said Carol. "But I *do* love action!"

"Possibly you would enjoy participating in a

labor strike," said Phil, amused, and really desirous of getting an opinion.

"Oh, Mr. Tracy, do you know one might as well wave a flag of treason in the face of some Colorado voters as to say 'Labor Strike'? They are getting what someone has called 'dead tired' of them. But of course dropping a proposition isn't the way to solve it, and I wouldn't mind being a labor leader, if I might be trusted."

"Provided you were elected, what would be your first move?"

"I would find some other job, requiring labor."

"Then you think being a labor leader doesn't mean work?"

"Some work in that capacity, and some work others pretty strenuously. But I would go to work in the mines, or in the shop, or the office, and set an example to men under me, by doing the best I could for my employer,— getting to work promptly, not paying much attention to leaving precisely on the minute of closing hour, thinking up methods and plans for my employer's benefit, using my head, hands, and heart, and then, when we met together as laborers, I should feel that whatever theories I might have to offer had been put into practice, as far as I myself were concerned. I should be able with a clear conscience to advocate the Golden Rule, day in and day out. I would seek opportunity to consult with capitalists and as many employers as possible, about adopting the same rule in their business dealings,

for their own best interests as well as for the good of those in their employ. It is *scientific*,— the only scientific method! Don't you believe it, Mr. Tracy?" Carol's eyes were shining and a flush in her cheeks betrayed her seriousness.

"But this is a picnic,— I almost forgot. Picnickers are supposed to be out for recreation, aren't they? Perhaps bread and jam should be eaten with lighter conversation," she said.

"The Golden Rule ought to go well with anything, anywhere," acknowledged Phil, loyally. "I agree with you, perfectly; but men generally are not ready for its application. They have, evidently, more faith in submarines and bombs than in each other."

"Better times are on the way, I am sure. I'm going to hope so, anyway, as hard as ever I can," she concluded. Looking across the table, she caught a glance from Marshall. Dimpling and lifting her glass, she said: "What could be nicer?" He was eating a cherry ice. So was she.

"Was that remark addressed to me?" asked Phil, not observing the motion.

"To no one in particular, unless it may have been to myself," she replied, mischievously.

"Are you in the habit of talking to yourself?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"Mentally, I suppose. We all do that."

"Oh, Mr. Tracy, haven't you heard that I just dote on oral conversation with Carol Wilton,—

that Carol and I are regular gossips and confidantes? "

"Spare me! I hadn't meant to infer so much."

"Ha, ha! I couldn't have blamed you. I surely gave you reason. But isn't this a delicious ice? "

"It is so. And I am to believe that is what you defined as so extremely nice a moment ago."

"Yes. And in your travels abroad, did you find a lovelier place for a picnic than Eastlake Park, Los Angeles? "

"Not for a place of its size,— nor better company than we have to-day."

"Of course not. America affords the best the world affords."

"And her choicest product is the American Girl."

"Thank you for my share of the compliment, but isn't that unjust to the American Boy? "

"I think not. He is made of coarser material, and takes to stony ground and the Broad Way like a gambler to a race course. If it were not for the nice girls to hold him in check, he would more than likely go his pace to the lower end of the route."

"You differ from most men in not attributing his failings to Eve."

"Where's the use? She has something to answer for, quite possibly; but a typical boy takes the wrong way chiefly because of his curiosity to see where he will bring up, and partly owing to his

obstinacy. By the way, have you heard of the Oxford professor who claims to have translated a tablet antedating the Book of Genesis, and attributing the disobedience of the race to Noah?"

"No, tell me about it, please."

"According to his translation, men were supposed to have been created to appease a desire of the gods for worship. Proving indifferent worshippers, they were condemned to extinction by flood. A goddess managed to save Noah, the king, and a few of his pious companions. After the flood he became a gardener, and was permitted to eat of every tree of the garden, except the Cassia. He rebelled, and inaugurated disease and early deaths in consequence."

"That sounds mythical."

"So it does. I'd rather take the Genesis version, not that I care especially about exonerating Noah, but owing to the reason ascribed for the creation of man."

"I agree with you! But to return. Were you a typical boy?"

"Guess I was. Anyhow, I got the chastisements supposed to be applicable to one."

"Did they benefit you?"

"I didn't think so at the time, though they made me more cautious about being found out, and they seemed to increase my obstinacy."

"Are you then so dreadfully obstinate?" was a smiling query.

Phil nodded with sly determination.

"Won't some one have more ice? Mr. Marshall, Dr. Merriman? Let me help you to some more," begged Mrs. Morley.

"Shall I pass our glasses?" asked Phil of Carol.

"Do, please. And Miss Tolmy's is empty, too." As she spoke, Mr. Nicholson sprang over their board seat and bore it away with his own.

"Well, well," sighed Dr. Merriman, "it looks as if we were eating to live instead of living to eat; but I certainly think that is the best cherry ice I ever tasted." Passing his sherbet cup, "Just a little more, Mrs. Morley," he said, "a mere trifle."

"I think it is even better than pineapple ice, don't you?" asked Miss Tolmy of Carol, as Mr. Nicholson returned, bearing beside the cups a tray of small cakes, which he scattered along the cloth in a sinuous line from his own plate past Phil's.

"You're a treasure, Mr. Nicholson," said Carol, helping herself.

"*Isn't* he kind?" acceded Miss Tolmy, whereupon Phil, snatching a small branch of eucalyptus which lay just behind on the ground, began shooing imaginary flies from Mr. Nicholson's shoulders.

"There aren't any flies on Mr. Nicholson that I can see," laughed Miss Tolmy.

"Well, I have to make believe there are," an-

swered Phil. "He's getting altogether too many compliments."

Luncheon over, the party collected and packed remnants, stored them away in the car, and went to the alligator farm not far distant.

"Over a thousand alligators! Just think of that," said Ruby.

"Yes, and I want one to carry home," added Carol. "Somebody find me a box, please."

"Oh, I don't want to ride in the same car with you, then," said Ruby. "I'd really, honestly, rather ride with a mouse!"

As Mr. Nicholson still continued his devotion to Miss Tolmy's welfare, Carol asked Ruby privately if she weren't glad he was "provided for."

"Yes, but he needn't act as if none of the rest of us existed."

Carol's under lip had the pressure of her teeth, for she felt like laughing aloud. However, she answered, presently: "If he does as well in conducting his business affairs, he's a partner worth having." It was her private opinion that Mr. Nicholson had taken a very shrewd way of learning how strong a hold he had on Miss Ruby's heart.

CHAPTER IX

AN EVENING WITH AUNT LUCINDA

"*Will I go to the theātre?* Wăll, I guess I'm ruther tew old tew begin. I never went tew one in my life. Don't yeou ever think mebbe it's sinful?" said Aunt Lucinda to Phil, who had politely invited her to make one of a box-party, expecting, it must be confessed, that she would refuse.

"Why, no, not in itself. I think I can learn considerable by seeing a good play," he answered.

"But there's sech a bad name connected with theātres, I don't see heow yeou ken get any good eout of any of 'em. It's like eatin' a whole lot o' shucks tew get at a grain of corn; and likely's not, the grain's musty when yeou're done with the shucks."

"But our kernel for to-night has already been husked. It's the real thing,— fine actors, elegant costumes, foreign scenery and elaborate music. And besides, auntie, how can one really know whether a thing is good or bad from one's own view point till one sees it and judges for himself?"

"It's enough fer me tew know that the Methodist church don't approve of 'em. I believe the committee knew what they wuz a doin' when they

passed the resolewtions at the conf'runce. And I agree with the old-timers among 'em abeout dancin', too. I think it's a turrible temptation of the Evil One. I dew hope, Phil, fer yeour father's and mother's sakes, yeou won't never go to dances." Aunt Lucinda looked warily about as she spoke, and not finding other listeners near, she added, "I want to warn yeou still farther, that yeou must beware of susciety girls. They're born flirts, most of 'em, an' they'll fix themselves up tew look like angels, an' smile on yeou ez innersunt ez cherubs, an' all the time they're jest a tryin' to get one more tossel on to their string, or string tew their bow, whichever they call it, and they don't keer no more fer yeour feelin's than they do fer the feelin's of a dog like Pug." Possibly the old lady mentioned Pug, because just then he brushed against her gown as she stood in the hall; and immediately she was reminded of the fondness for such pets, manifested by the society girls she had described, so she qualified her assertion by saying: "Not so much,— most of 'em. I don't see what Ida wants of that one. He's good fer nothin' that I ken see but tew lie 'reound an' eat."

Phil was growing nervous; but Aunt Lucinda felt the importance of her opportunity and persisted. "Yeou won't think I'm interferin', I hope, but I allers consider it to be my bounden duty tew tell folks ef I notice any breakers a comin' their way. Sometimes they thank me, and sometimes they don't. Then yeou see I knew yeour father,

Phil. Eben wuz allers a very respectable man, and he'll be preoud of yeou, ef yeour real stiddy and 'tend tew business."

"I hope to make him so; but don't worry about me, auntie. I've seen a good deal of the world, if I am young, and I can tell pretty nearly the genuine from the false."

"Young folks allers think they know," she sighed.

"Anyhow, don't worry about my heart. I'll not lose it to any girl who isn't willing to give me hers in return, and I'm sure to get the best one ever."

"Yeou talk jest ez my Jimmie did, and he, poor boy, got a girl that's allers be'n sickly, and a good deal of a drag on him."

"But he loves her, doesn't he?" Phil questioned, pertinently, "and she loves him."

"Mercy, yes! She thinks he's the whole world an' planetary system combined, an' well she may. He does pritty nigh all her work in the heouse, besides his own in the fact'ry, an' tends the babies nights, to boot. They hev six neow, three boys an' three girls."

"Ah? Quite a handful for Jimmie, ain't it?"

"Ef he hadn't 'a' had a good strong constitootion, he never could 'a' stood it," she declared.

It was finally arranged that Mrs. Morley should remain at home with their elderly guest, though not without protest on the part of Mr. Morley,

who offered to stay himself. Mrs. Morley was quite determined, however, so eight o'clock found her sitting by a cozy grate fire in the den, with Aunt Lucinda close by, in a soft-padded rocker. The lights overhead were shaded, but the gas log under the brick mantel sent out a cheerful blaze, which one could hardly fail to appreciate on an early spring night, even in lower California.

Aunt Lucinda watched the play and sparkle of the flame awhile in silence. It was new to her, and quite different from the wood fires in the great chimney places of the days of her youth. To her vision, however, beauty paled into insignificance before expense. Nothing could long prove attractive to her which was due to extravagance, and she wished to feel at ease about the gas grate.

"It must cost consid'able to keep that a goin', Ida," she said, at length.

"Oh, no, not much. Less than a coal fire," was the answer.

"Yeou don't say so!" exclaimed the guest, and after a moment's reflection, in which she drew her white crocheted shawl with its purple border a little off her shoulders, with a feeling that she might enjoy the artificial heat to its fullest, she continued: "I s'pose Charles is a makin' money fast eout here, an' yeou ken efford tew spend."

"He is doing well, but we are far from being wealthy. We try to save a little every year, and we hope to have enough laid by to make us comfortable when we are old."

"And I s'pose yeou give away a little ev'ry year tew missions and sech like. Don't yeou?"

"Yes, aunt."

"That's right. I think folks had orter give accordin' ez they 've be'n prospered; but most of 'em don't,— not even a tenth. There's Charles's father,— he could never get enough ahead tew give, he said, when his childern wuz little,— an' Sary wuz never much at givin' eoutside her own fam'ly. She raked an' scraped all she could get tewgether an' sent it on tew Charles when he wuz off tew college, an' the same tew Clarence, when he went. But they had tew help themselves some, ez 'twuz, an' I guess mebbe it didn't hurt 'em any. Charles wuz abeout ez big a mischief ez ever I see when he wuz a boy. He wuz allers a cuttin' up some caper 'r other. I never could understand heow Sary could take it so calm. My Jimmie wa'n't nowheres in comparison; but he managed tew work me all up once in awhile, so I jest had tew shet myself up in a room upstairs and pray fer grace. He wuz converted an' made a member of the Methodist church when he wuz past twenty. I'd begun tew think his days of probation wuz abeout ended. And neow I guess he's havin' his turn a prayin' fer grace. Jonathan, my oldest, and Mary j'ined when they wa'n't but fourteen and sixteen."

"Do they all live near you?"

"Jonathan an' Mary dew, but Jimmie went over

tew Rockville where he could get work in the fact'ry. Jonathan runs my farm, an' I've got a little heouse all tew myself, deown in a corner lot. There's a nice stun wall on three sides and a picket fence in front. 'Līshy fixed it afore he died, an' I never could feel right tew live anywheres else, though Mary an' her man asked me to go an' live with them. She's got two big boys, an' I couldn't stand the racket. Jonathan's oldest is of age an' past, an' a big help on the farm; an' his girl, Matildy, she teaches. I've got ten grandchildern in all; an' none of 'em married, though some on 'em w'u'd be better off ef they wuz, accordin' tew my idees."

"I hope they will all prove a comfort to you and their parents."

"Mebbe they will an' mebbe they won't. Jeddy,— that's Jimmie's youngest boy,— is a good deal seeh a mischief ez Charles wuz at his age. He's jest full of his pranks. Julyette thinks he's the smartest of the whole lot."

"Charles is one splendid man, aunt, whatever he was when a boy."

"I'm glad tew hear yeou stand up fer him. I s'pose yeou're both officers, mebbe, in the church?"

"No. I'm a member of the finance committee, that is all."

"Wăll, I hope yeou will try tew exert an inflewunce fer good on these young folks here a visitin' yeou. They seem tew be pritty giddy. I wuz

sorry tew see Charles go off with 'em tew the theātre. P'raps he wouldn't 'a' thought o' goin' ef they hadn't 'a' b'en here."

"We go occasionally. It diverts our minds, amuses us, and grown people need recreation as much, almost, as children."

"Wăll, I dun'no' what this generation is a comin' tew! 'Twuz all the amusement *I* wanted when *I* wuz young tew 'tend singin' school er the fortnightly sewin' circles, er a quiltin', er huskin' bee. I don't see why folks can't be satisfied with things that ain't noways hurtful tew their moral natur's. The more they go tew these excitin' doin's, the more they want tew, an' by an' by, I guess mebbe 'twill take all the ingenuity of Beelzebub himself to cunjure up amusemunts tew satisfy 'em. I've heerd tell they hev red an' blew an' green lights an' the sulphur smell at the theātres a'ready. Is that so, Ida?"

"It is true that chemicals are sometimes used to produce colored lights, and that they cause an unpleasant odor; but in the large theatres in the cities, they use electricity under colored glass bulbs which produce beautiful, soft shades, without odor. If you could see some of the transformation scenes I believe you would think them lovely. And I want you to see the 'Mission Play.' It is out at San Gabriel, near one of the old missions, and is a good deal like a Sunday school book illustrated; all about the discovery of California, and the mission fathers, and what they did to civilize

and Christianize the natives. It's wonderful! Won't you promise to go, aunt?"

"I don't like tew make rash promises. Besides, what yeou might call a Sunday school book pictered eout might look very diff'runt tew me. I s'pose there's love scenes in it, ain't there?"

"Yes, a native wedding."

"I thought ez much. Sech plays, with a little good an' a lot of evil, allure an' allure, till they turn even Christians' hearts. I wuz allers opposed tew love makin' on the stage. It sets young folks crazy tew imertate, an' the fust they know they think they 're a lovin' somebuddy, when it's all buncom. Sometimes they don't find eout the sham till they've gone an' got married, an' then, likely ez not, in a little while, there's a deevorce."

"But everyone likes a true lover," said Mrs. Morley, a trifle disheartened; but trying her best to be cheerful. "Those natives were encouraged to be true to each other, by the old padres, as the brave mission fathers were called."

"Wäll, I can't see no good in a theätre, myself; an' don't yeou r'ally think, now, Ida, 't would 'a' b'en better ef Charles had 'a' taken them young folks to some interlectyewal discourse, or to some Salvation Army doin's?"

"But Phil and Marshall invited *us*, aunt."

"Heow fur advanced in worldliness they must be! I'm turrible afeerd Phil is a goin' tew be struck on that girl, Carol. She's like a painted picter, and looks is awful deceivin'. Then she's

got the fascinatin'est ways I ever see in a young woman; an' young men take turrible easy tew 'em. I dew hope yeou'll keep a good watch on 'em, an' not hev a flirtation a goin' on right here in yeour heouse, an' the blame a restin' on yeour shoulders. It's resky, my way o' lookin' at it — Phil bein' a relation, tew. His fam'ly would take it hard ef he wuz disappīnted in love at his age. Young men sometimes never get over a first disappīntment. I've heerd uv 'em a committen' suicide."

"They seem to be sensible young people, all of them, Aunt Lucinda; and Carol, while she is vivacious, wouldn't, I feel sure, do a mean thing. She wouldn't flirt with Phil. If she makes any effort to attract him, it will be because she honestly likes him, or I am very much mistaken in her. I've talked with her about these matters, and I know she has plenty of common sense."

"Wăll, I'm glad yeou've talked with her abeout sech things. That shows good jedgment on yeour part. Phil seems tew be a likely young man, an' ef he could marry some good stiddy girl like my Mary, he'd prob'ly settle right deown."

"You have had a good many years of experience, aunt, and ought to be pretty well posted in affairs of the heart," conceded the hostess with some doubts.

"Yes, I wuz pritty self-willed myself, when I wuz young. But Līshy, he'd give in, when he see 't I wouldn't, an' when he wuz 'sot on' havin' his way, and I could, witheout a taxin' my conscience

tew much, *I*'d give in. But when I knew positive I wuz in the right, I never would. I remember once he wanted to sell one of eour old keows, an' he had a chance tew talk tew a man abeout it on a Sunday. I warned him; but he stuck tew it 'twuz all right, because the man lived three er four miles away, an' 'twant convenient tew see him on a week day. The feller calkilated tew come and take the keow away on Monday mornin', an' ef yeou'll believe it, she threw herself in the stall an' broke her leg on Sunday night. Lishy looked sheepish enough when he come in from the stable; an' I kinder got the whole thing eout of him by degrees. Then I said, 'Lishy, shell yeou want tew make any more Sunday trades?' An' he says: 'I guess I'll let up on 'em a couple o' Sundays, Cindy.' But 'twuz the last. He lived a good while after that, tew. He wuz a well-meanin' man, Lishy wuz."

Mrs. Morley permitted her guest to indulge in reminiscences, as she rocked herself gently in the soft-padded rocker. It was better than argument. She supposed Aunt Lucinda was too old to learn new ways, or to change her beliefs regarding the essentials of life.

The mantel clock at length aroused the lady, and she exclaimed: "Ken it be thet we hev set here an' talked an hour? It's time I wuz a goin' upstairs. I s'pose yeou'll hev tew sit up till ten er eleven, mebbe, Ida. Don't yeou get dreadful sleepy an' tired?"

"Oh, no, I'll not need to sit up. Sometimes, when it is necessary to do so, I amuse myself reading, or writing letters. I'll go upstairs with you now, aunt, and turn on the lights in your room. I want you to retire and rise just when you please while you are with us. If you are up early, and feel hungry, the cook will get you something to eat. She is usually up at six."

"Wăll, I don't want tew make no trouble; but I'm used tew gettin' up early, an' ef I won't disturb nobody, mebbe I'll take a little walk somewheres 'reound,— deown the road a piece, mebbe, where I see some old-fashioned hollyhocks a growin', ez I come in."

CHAPTER X

DREAMS

"If people can't have what they want, there is no better way than to try to be satisfied with what they may have, I suppose," said Ruby, with a yawn.

"What in this wide world do you want that you cannot have?" asked Carol, facetiously.

Ruby smiled in a cursory way and proceeded to unfasten her kid boots. "I have no maid to help me off with my things, and I'm — so — sleepy," she answered, presently.

"Why didn't you bring Lucy?"— meaning a young orphan girl who had lived with the Guilds for several years.

"She would have been so pleased to have come," was the reply. "And that reminds me how ungrateful I am. Why am I entitled to so much more than she, just because I happen to be Mr. Guild's daughter?"

"Oh, I think it didn't just happen so, Ruby. Naturally, you inherited a right to more. If some people didn't succeed in making something of themselves and their progeny, we might all be in the slums, and then what would become of the poor Lucys and Johnnies, I wonder?"

"Yet it does seem hard for the slummerites."

"Actually, it doesn't make much difference whether one has large sums of money or not. It's the moral qualifications which count. One may exact sweets from life anywhere."

"In a cobwebby attic, with a half-dozen kids to be fed and no bread coming in?"

"No one has any business to live with cobwebs; attics may be clean, my dear; and if the inmates love each other and try to do what they can for themselves, they should be happy. Why not there as well as in a mansion, or a palace, with threats of the 'Black Hand' staring one in the face, and with dynamite under the doorstep and bombs in one's bouquets? Honestly, Ruby, I can't conceive of a possible case where love, and faith, can't find a way to bread and butter and all else that is necessary to happiness. It is selfishness, and distrust and laziness that make for poverty and misery. Don't you believe it?"

"I believe that I ought to believe it, but I should dislike being put to the test. I'm afraid my faith is a good deal like molasses candy,— stiff when it is kept cool, and soft and runny in a warm place."

"In other words, you think my theories are all right for a set of human beings that may exist a thousand years from now?" was the reply, then abruptly: "Did Marshall tell you that he and Phil are planning on going to San Diego next week sometime?"

"No, and aren't they coming back?"

"They may — for a day or two."

Both young ladies had fallen into a habit of speaking of the young men privately in this familiar manner, as did their host and hostess.

"You don't appear to take the matter very much to heart, Ruby."

"Do you realize that less than a week ago we had never seen either of them?"

"But you have known Phil by reputation for a much longer period. In fact, I thought your interest in him dated back to your sister's visit to Boston, where she had the good fortune to meet him."

Ruby tossed stray strands of hair back from her face. The starry light in her eyes was superbly reflected from a large plate glass mirror opposite her.

"How one's hair does tangle if there's the least breeze," she observed, piquantly.

"I didn't notice any breeze coming up," replied Carol, laughing, "but it seemed to me that Marshall was quite determined to be exclusive,— or was it you, Ruby? You did look bewitching this evening, indeed you did. Pink is your color; and those lovely Cecil Brunner roses he gave you! Well, it looks a little as if matters were growing serious."

"Is that so? Well, I hadn't the least idea it looked that way to anyone, I'm sure. He was talking coming back about the Yale and Harvard

races, and about some young people he met at Gales Ferry, at the Harvard quarters on the Thames."

"Ah? Funny,— Phil was telling me about a week he spent in a house boat on the Nile. I forget the name he gave it; but it was like a big cruiser. A friend of the uncle he was traveling with had rented it for the season."

"Tell me some of his experiences."

"Do you know that it is past midnight? It was nearly that when we left the Country Club."

"That doesn't matter."

"Not when you are — so — sleepy?" laughed Carol.

"I've gotten all over that."

"Well, my dear, there were only bachelors on board, and Phil was the youngest bored. See? Nothing from morning till night but yarns and grub, billiards and chess, smoke and then more yarns. He made some excuse to get off every day, and went to the nearest port sight-seeing."

"Alexandria, I suppose. But, Carol, weren't the decorations perfectly lovely at the Club? Such quantities of ferns and those gorgeous California poppies! M-m-m-m-m!"

"Splendid! There were such fine people too, and so many elegant costumes. What a glorious time we are having!"

"But go on about the boat. What else did Phil say?"

"'Never again for me.' 'Merely this and noth-

ing more,' as Poe said of the raven's croaking." With this remark, Carol lifted a pillow from the bed, preparatory to turning back the covers, and found beneath a white, satiny case, tied with ribbons.

"Oh, Ruby,— somebody's been getting married!" and dancing, box in hand, toward the electric light near the dresser, she held it up for closer examination. Ruby followed with much curiosity to view the contents.

When opened, a card from Mrs. Morley appeared. It read: "Girls, I thought you might like to dream over this cake. A friend of ours brought it from Redlands to-day. I hope you will dream something worth while."

"Lucky you found it when you did."

"Yes, and it was good of Ida to think of us. Now take your share of the cake, and don't disappoint her!"

"I seldom dream. You will have to see things in your sleep for both of us. You can. There's nothing you can't do, Carol."

"Except to manage you, and one or two other little things. Ruby, you exalt my aspirations! With you by, my impulses are Herculean! I can even hope to dream for two. Good-night. A kiss and benedictions on your philosophical brow." This with appropriate gestures and illustrations.

"Oh, Carol, you are just killing! If Phil doesn't get a —"

"Hush, dear. If some one should — I believe

— truly I do — that I heard a sound near the door!"

"You are beginning to dream," whispered Ruby.

When this young lady awoke, sunlight was pouring in a golden flame through open windows. In spite of her previous declaration to the contrary, she had dreamed dreams over the wedding cake. While her companion slept, she reënacted them in her thoughts, and as Carol at length opened her eyes, she said with suppressed excitement: "It is time we were up, dear; besides, I had a dream."

"Truly?" Carol half arose and looked into Ruby's face. Reassured, she confessed: "I dreamed, too, of going to Mars in an airship; but I had no sooner gotten there than I awoke,— no chance at all to explore, not even a lone fisherman at the landing. It was fun, though, going up, sort of a misty atmosphere, like an extension of the milky way. I'm glad we didn't have an accident and drop, for I don't remember seeing any life-saving apparatus anywhere about." Falling back on her pillow, she said: "Now yours, please," and turning a listening ear, she half closed her still weighty eyelids.

"I thought I was walking alone in a forest of tall eucalyptus and palm trees," began Ruby. "In a little while, I met Melba and Caruso and Schumann-Heink—"

"Equal to the flight of the airship," commented Carol. "Pardon. Go on, please."

"They asked me if I were looking for some one, and I said I was in search of you, Carol, and I described you as a pretty girl in a white *crêpe de chine* gown."

"Thank you. I'm glad it wasn't that old figured kimono!"

"They were sure they had seen you a little way back, and Melba said she was sure I could overtake you, if I would hurry, as you were walking slowly. Oh, it all seemed as natural. Caruso looked as if he thought I should pay for the information; but I didn't offer to, and went on. Pretty soon I saw you, just as plainly, and the very instant Phil came rushing out from behind a clump of trees, and snatched you away. I called: 'Carol — Carol — Carol,'— oh, so loudly, I wonder you didn't wake; but you paid no attention, even in the dream, and as I turned away, Marshall bobbed up from somewhere, and said to me: 'It's a fact, they've gone and left us.' With that, he pulled a spray of ivy, root and all, from the path, and wound it around my neck. Where we finally went, I can't say. But it was a vivid dream, and it contains a warning."

With a merry laugh, Carol repeated: "Phil 'snatched' me away! That is too good! And didn't I make any resistance?"

"You didn't have time. It took you by sur-

prise, you see. But now you've been warned, and can be on the lookout."

"Trust me," she answered, lightly.

In a brief time she had bathed and dressed, and was below stairs ahead of the more deliberate Ruby. There she met Marshall, who begged her to sing.

"I would do better to have an accompanist; but as Ruby isn't ready, I'll try it alone."

First she played strains of an air from "The Prince of Pilsen," and sang "The Message of the Violets." Meanwhile, her blue eyes, full of mirth, were turned upon his face, now and then, as he stood near by. This finished, she began crooning, prettily, an African mother's song to her baby; then thinking to please him better, she sang a classic,— chin uplifted, and cheeks aglow. It was a selection which a music lover like Marshall could not fail to enjoy.

He expressed his appreciation quite to her satisfaction, then she said: "I'll bring down all the music I have with me,— quite a variety,— sometime, and you shall make your own choice."

"Do you know that you would do well in opera? Haven't you ever thought of going on the stage?" he asked, forgetting to thank her.

"Yes, but I think I would rather not. It is a 'dog's life,' I have been told."

"Being a star and thrilling audiences wouldn't be any inducement, then?"

"No, not being a grand opera star. It is all

right for those who feel called; but my ambition lies in another direction."

"Teaching, perhaps; you certainly wouldn't let your talent go to waste," he persisted.

"Not intentionally," was a smiling reply. "Is it a waste to use it for family and friends, to sing in public for those in the home town, when opportunity offers?"

"Well — no — not entirely; but think of having the world for an audience."

"Perhaps you overestimate my ability. The call comes with the power to respond from the heart, it seems to me."

Phil and Ruby entered as they conversed.

"Don't let us interrupt your tête-à-tête," said Phil.

"Oh, it's not so important. You are quite welcome," acknowledged Carol.

"I think I heard you humming a part of 'If I but Knew' awhile ago. If you don't mind, I would greatly like to hear the whole," he continued, seating himself beside Ruby.

"Come play for me," she requested that young lady.

Without notes, Carol sang, her face toward her audience, her voice clear and full and sweet as the morning air laden with fragrance of flowers.

At the close of the first stanza, she was looking off through a window, upon the flower-decked trellis of the garden.

At the end of the second stanza, her violet eyes

were bent upon Marshall: "If I but knew — if I but knew."

The words of the closing lines fell in charming cadences:

> "If I but knew what the tree tops say,
> Whispering secrets night and day,
> I'd make a song my love, for you —
> If I but knew — if I but knew."

The violet deeps told Phil: "There, you have it all. It was for you,— and I'm sure you were pleased."

He gave her a hearty encore, in which Marshall joined. She bowed her thanks, as a star upon the stage might have done; first to Phil, then to Marshall, and went waltzing like a winged fairy,— so daintily and airily she swung,— out of the living room.

Phil, impulsively, started in pursuit.

Marshall said to Ruby: "We're deserted,— but never mind."

Her face flushed, slightly. She was reminded of her dream. Phil and Carol had disappeared together, and Marshall was trying to console her. She glanced at his hands as if she expected to see the ivy chain.

"Why can't we take a stroll somewhere, too?" he asked.

"We might," and glancing at the clock, "It's not yet eight. Where shall we go?"

"The Park?" he suggested.

As there was no one within sight to whom they might offer excuses, they left the house unceremoniously. The way was quite clear down the asphalt walk, down the steps leading from the terrace, and for some distance up the street.

At the Park, seated on one of the long benches near the lake, they watched the flocks of duck moving gracefully through the water.

Marshall bought some popped corn of a dealer on the grounds, and they threw kernels at the floating fowls and laughed at their eager scrambling.

"They're a selfish lot. Don't you think so?" asked Marshall.

"Like people, each wanting more than his neighbor has," she assented.

"But we wouldn't take ours right out of a neighbor's mouth, would we?"

"We might, if we wanted it badly,— more than he. The one who wants a thing most makes greatest effort to get it, I think."

"But all are not equally strong."

"No, but provided they are equally strong."

Directly, Ruby espied a familiar looking couple coming up the street which she and Marshall had taken. One of the two had fluffy golden hair.

"There they are!" she exclaimed, breathlessly.

"They will overtake us," said Marshall. "But they can't steal our kernel. We have already devoured it."

CHAPTER XI

THE OLD WAY AND THE NEW

Aunt Lucinda was pleased to learn that the Morley family, including guests and servants, would attend church at least once on Sunday.

"I s'pose somebuddy hez tew stay home to cook meals an' see to 'reddin' up.' We ain't got tew that pass where we ken live witheout eatin'," she said to Mrs. Morley; "but I think 'twould be more healthy fer us ef yeou wouldn't hev so much rich stuff, Ida. Breown bread an' baked beans an' corn-beef with cabbage, and riz doughnuts an' pieplant pie 're good 'nough fer anybuddy. These 'ere saleds an' iced fixin's give folks dispepsy."

"We will have some brown bread and fig pudding to-day, aunt," answered Mrs. Morley, pleasantly. "Made of fresh figs. You'll like it, I know."

The service which the Morley party attended was held in a large auditorium, and its immensity was somewhat awesome to one so long accustomed to a small, old-fashioned country church, like many still standing in New England rural communities. The grand organ and superb choir stirred Aunt Lucinda's emotions yet more deeply; and the ser-

mon was destined to make a novel impression, for it was upon her favorite theme: "Bearing the Cross." She was astonished to find that the speaker's ideas differed widely from her own. She had considered the cross not only a necessary burden to mankind; but believed it to be a burden which should try men's souls, chiefly by its weight of pain and suffering. The heavier the cross could be made to feel, the greater the glory, and the more dazzling the crown to be won. This preacher, evidently, looked upon a cross as something which might be borne with continual rejoicing: "Men bearing them as heavy burdens, grievous to be borne, are bearing an ignominious cross of their own making," he said,— "a poor, miserable, thorny cross, which makes the bearer poor and miserable and pessimistic and discouraged and altogether degraded." He gave as an illustration: "The man who grumbles and wears a long face and refuses to be happy, because, forsooth, he has some disease which he has contracted through disobedience to God's laws,— an habitual headache, a sour taste in his mouth, a weight on his chest, a pain in his great toe. The cross he has constructed for himself is dyspepsia and gout and a long train of ills, with a long list of technical names to designate their separate horrors. But the cross the Lord wants him to bear is forgetfulness of self, in endeavor to regain his lost health by right thinking and right living!"

"Wäll, I never!" thought Aunt Lucinda. "I

wonder what he would say to rheumatics, contracted by a *minister of the gospel*, while he wuz attendin' a fun'ral, on a cold, blust'rin' day, in Connecticut? I've seen jest sech a case."

The pulpit orator must certainly have had her pet theories in mind, and he evidently intended to scatter them to the winds of a new era, for he gave another illustration of "a mistaken individual who supposed he was bearing the Lord's cross in a sprained ankle, the result of slipping on the ice when on his way to visit a sick friend,— that was way back East, you know; here it might have been an orange peeling, or an unnoticed break in the pavement. The Lord doesn't send sprained ankles, nor rheumatism, nor dyspepsia, nor any evil whatsoever. They are of man's own contriving, through ignorant or reckless or willful misdeeds," he argued, "but if, in patience and optimism and love and trust man strives to overcome self-imposed and so-called hereditary evils, he is bearing God's cross in God's way, and He will make the burden light. We are to exercise the power which the Almighty bestows. It lies within each of us, and it is ready to our call. It is all-conquering, never-failing. Claim your sonship! Glorify your Father through obedience to His teaching, given from the lips of the Elder Brother, who said: 'Take up your cross and follow me. My yoke is easy and my burden is light.'"

Returning to the Morleys', Aunt Lucinda commented: "Yeou've got one uv them newfangled

preachers eout here, I see. He would make eout that rheumatics and broken bones aire ez comfitable ez a bed of geese feathers in midwinter at 'The Notch,' er ez one o' them 'ere plush-backed Morris cheers. I like ministers tew call a cross *a cross*, an' that's jest what eour Methodist minister does back home. Ef we suffer here, we'll sing an' laugh, mebbe, over yender."

After dinner, which was more to her liking than the sermon, the elderly guest settled herself in the blue room for a nap; but was aroused by the ringing of the door bell. Soon a second ring was heard, and by and by, a third. The last was so impelling that, clad as she was, in a black satteen petticoat, and a loose sacque of figured dimity, which "Mary" had modeled after a paper pattern, she went downstairs to learn the cause. It occurred to her that Charles and Ida might be having a neighborhood prayer meeting, or a Sunday class for poor children of their acquaintance, and that they might have forgotten to mention the matter to her, or possibly had disliked to disturb her rest.

With some trepidation, she found her way to the kitchen, and inquired of the cook, who were in the "parlor."

"It's just some company for the young people," she answered.

"Yeou don't mean invited company?"

"Some callers," was the rather curt reply.

"Wăll — I thought — But mebbe it don't mat-

ter what I thought," replied the guest, recollecting that servants were not supposed to know all about their mistresses' affairs. And she hurriedly found her way back to the blue room.

The sound of conversation and laughter and music was not conducive to sleep, and she finally determined to see for herself how her grand-nephew and niece spent their Sunday afternoons. She brushed and retwisted her hair, put on her best black henrietta gown, a lace collar and cameo pin, and a white embroidered crêpe shawl, which, with its long, silken fringe, fell as gracefully as possible over her angular shoulders.

"I guess mebbe I'll dew," she mentally commented as she took a final glance at her reflection in the mirror of the dressing-table.

When she entered the living room, Carol was singing; but Mrs. Morley arose, and led her elderly guest to a seat near her own, then, when opportunity offered, introduced the callers, thinking: "Aunt Lucinda looks really nice in that shawl. I didn't know she had anything so pretty."

But Aunt Lucinda could not permit the occasion to pass without her wonted admonitions. The callers were barely outside the house, before she began questioning Mr. Morley concerning them.

"Some friends of ours," he answered. "They wanted to see Phil and the rest, here, and the young men have so much business on hand through the week, they find it hard to make calls except on Sunday afternoons."

"Dew yeou s'pose them young folks got rested a comin' here?"

"I hope so."

"It's a wonder tew me—"

"It probably rests you more, aunt, to attend church, read your Bible and take naps. It is too late for afternoon service, at the Y. W. C. A., but there will be dozens of churches open this evening again. Would you like to go somewhere?"

"I never get tired a goin' tew church, though I dew like old-fashioned orthodox preachin' in the pulpit,— and its practice by the pewholders, tew. It's susciety, giddy susciety, that makes me tired."

Phil laughed as he said: "You're having your cross in putting up with us, aren't you, auntie?"

"Wăll, it might be wuss. I'll acknowledge, it might be wuss," she answered. Phil was becoming a favorite. He seemed to appreciate her efforts in his behalf, and she liked his calling her "Auntie." Wise Phil. Yet, she greatly feared that Charles and Ida were trying to serve both God and Mammon, with Mammon at the fore.

Mr. Morley, not craving further argument, said, addressing Phil and Marshall: "I believe a smoke in the roof garden would go well, boys."

"All right," agreed Phil, and turning to Aunt Lucinda: "I never smoke more than two or three cigars a day. That isn't bad, is it?" If the truth be told, he rather enjoyed drawing out the old lady's opinions, especially as they were spoken

in the quaint dialect of a past generation in many Yankee communities.

"I s'pose yeou'd be better off tew let 'em alone," she answered, "though Līshy,— that's my husband that wuz,— smoked a pipe an' chewed terbacker till he wuz past seventy, an' said he couldn't see no harm in't. But one mornin' we wuz a hevin' prayers ez yews'yal, an' he wuz a readin' in Revelations abeout the New Jerewsalum, an' the verse: 'There shell in no way enter intew it anythin' that defileth,' caught a hold of him. He looked up tew me, an' he says: 'Cindy, I s'pect they won't be no spittoons a standin' 'reound in them hev'nly mansions, an' a man wouldn't feel like expectoratin' on them golden pavemunts. I might ez well give up terbacker afore I go, an' get a leetle kinder yewsed tew it.' Wăll, I didn't think he would; but he did. Still, he kerried it 'reound with him, an' one day when he thought *I* wa'n't nowhere 'reound, he took eout a big piece o' plug terbacker an' hed 'n argewmentation with it in his hand. I overheerd him say: 'Yeou can't come it over me. No-sir-ee! — not by a jug full.' And then he shook his head, kinder jerky like, an' chugged it back inter his pocket."

"Bravo for Uncle Elisha," said Mr. Morley.

When the gentlemen had left the room, the young ladies embraced the opportunity to walk in the garden.

"I dew hope, Ida, that yeou think sperityewal

things aire of most importunce," said the elderly guest to her sole companion in the living room.

"Oh, I do. Most certainly, I do! And I think it is being spiritually minded to be as happy as possible,—'rejoice always.'"

"Wăll, I dun'no'. The Good Book says: 'Tis better tew go tew the heouse of mournin' then tew the heouse of feastin'."

Just then, Carol's voice called: "Auntie, Oh, Auntie!" — accompanied by a tapping on the window at Aunt Lucinda's back. As she turned to listen, Carol said, coaxingly: "Come out and see the new kittens.— Do! A whole litter of six, awfully cute!"

"Humph! Kittens! Why a buddy'd think 'twus su'thin' uncommon," she replied. Nevertheless, she allowed Mrs. Morley to lead her to the tool house, where cat and kittens were at home in a box of straw.

Carol took one of the little, blind mites in her hand.

"Land sakes! Heow ken yeou bear tew hold the little brat?" exclaimed the old lady, with evident disgust.

"Oh, it's just as *dear*, auntie, such cunning little ears, and do look at its little pink nose, and those paws, like pussy willow buds. Mother cat loves it," and,— placing her ear close to the box, —"she's purring now, to 'beat the band.' She's proud as proud can be. You have shown her great

honor by calling to see her family, auntie, and she appreciates it."

"Wäll, I guess so,"— reluctantly, from Aunt Lucinda.

"Do you keep cats, Mrs. Dobbins?" asked Ruby.

"Why to be sure I dew. Ef I didn't, I'd be run over by rats an' mice; but I never made sech pets of 'em as some dew. I don't like tew have 'em lyin' 'reound on my cheer-cushions an' a sheddin' hairs in my vitt'als."

"I wonder if this old puss knows it's Sunday?" Ruby added amusively.

"Yes, indeed she does," answered Mrs. Morley, "for she always gets her dinner earlier on that day than usual, and she comes to the back door very promptly and asks for it."

"Wäll, I never! A cat a knowin' it's Sunday. More'n likely she's a thinkin' o' stuffin' an' nuthin' else," Aunt Lucinda commented.

"She's a good cat," insisted the hostess,— "never digs up plants, Steve says, nor catches his chickens."

Aunt Lucinda smiled.

"Dew yeou give her Sunday school lessons, Ida?" she asked, facetiously. "Anybuddy that ken teach cats is fitted eout tew teach the skum o' susciety. A'cordin' tew my way o' thinkin', 'twould pay 'em better tew spend their time a savin' souls."

"Oh, auntie, *please* say that you believe in a

hereafter for cats," pleaded Carol. Her appealing voice and the tender look in her violet eyes touched the older woman's heart.

In a tone, condescending, but not unkindly, she replied: "Ef ever yeou get tew heav'n, child, I hope yeou'll want what the Lord sees fit tew give yeou. Mebbe He'll give yeou a cat, and mebbe He won't; but cat 'r no cat, I hope yeou'll prove tew be one of the faithful ones,— a virgin, with yeour lamp trimmed an' a-burnin'."

"Thank you, auntie," answered Carol, sweetly, and with a pat on old pussy's head, she tucked the kitten beside her in the box of straw. This done, she espied in the doorway of the tool shed a chubby face overtopped by a mat of soft, brown curls.

A piping voice cried out: "*I* yant to see itte kitty! *I* yant to see — I do!"

It was Jamie Doane. He had run away. His white dress was besmeared with coal dust, his plump fingers tightly clasped a chunk of coal. He was shoeless, and one short sock, only, hung tenaciously to his little fat foot.

"Oh, the blesséd little kid! My camera! I *must* have a picture of Jamie and the kittens!" exclaimed Carol. In another instant she had disappeared.

"I'll call his mother," said Mrs. Morley.

And Aunt Lucinda declared: "Sech doin's, I never did see! I guess I better be a goin' in."

CHAPTER XII

THE MACHINE

"I suppose you women had enough of shopping yesterday to last awhile," said Mr. Morley, addressing the ladies of the party at the breakfast table.

"A *little* while," answered Ruby. "The shops here are perfectly lovely, though, and I wouldn't mind going again to-day."

"Do you think you have anything better to offer, Mr. Morley?" asked Carol.

"Something that looks better to me," was the smiling reply. "What do you say,— all of you, — to a ride in the machine out Pasadena and Alhambra way,— possibly to San Gabriel, where we could go over the old mission and see the play?"

"They ought to see 'The Mission Play' sometime before they leave," said Mrs. Morley. "I tried to get your aunt interested in it the other evening."

"It's well worth seeing," he answered. "They have a building on purpose, and running around on three sides in the open, they have arranged a miniature 'El Camino Real,'— the old Mission Road, you know,— which runs from San Diego

where the first mission was built, up country for a hundred miles or so, connecting the various missions; and there are exact copies of each old mission, scattered along at intervals, with a realistic background of California scenery. Then you would enjoy seeing the old adobe buildings, and other curiosities about the place."

"I should like it fine," said Phil.

"What kind of a machine aire yeou thinkin' of going in, Charles?" asked Aunt Lucinda.

"Why, a touring car, an automobile, you'd call it."

"Yes, I've seen automobiles in Connecticut but I never heerd 'em called machines. I didn't know but yeou had one of them 'ere airships they tell of."

"No, I haven't invested so far; but I have a fine car; a regular stunner. I consider it about as safe as anything going, and I would show you some of the prettiest country you ever laid eyes on,— mountains with snow-caps, and green hills just below, and flowers every inch of the way."

"Better go, auntie," advised Phil. "I'll stand sponsor for you if any ill comes of it."

"Humph! 'Ev'ry tub hez tew stand on its own bottom,' an' I couldn't get eout of holdin' responsibility for my akshuns, onless I c'u'd claim tew be feeble-minded. I thank yeou jest the same; but it seems tew me like temptin' Proverdunce, an' I guess mebbe I'll be better off here, er over tew Westlake Park. I never s'posed folks *could* be

so contented a loafin' 'reound ez they be there. Some of 'em jest set an' set, a lookin' at the water an' them 'ere ducks till I sh'u'd think they'd feel ez if they wuz part an' parcel of the benches. And there's a lot more, mostly women, that walk areound kinder aimless like, ez ef they never hed nothin' tew dew. I jedge some of 'em aire inverlids. I've hed considable exper'unce in my time with one ailmunt er anuther an' mebbe I c'u'd be a help tew some of 'em. I never see nothin' like boneset fer rheumatics, and catnip tea's better'n pills, anytime, tew keep off chills an' fever."

"When can you be ready to go, girls?" asked Mr. Morley, evidently anxious to be off.

Mrs. Morley glanced at the young ladies, inquiringly.

Carol, who had been sitting with her chin resting on one hand, her elbow on the table, herself an interested listener, answered quickly: "In ten minutes."

"Or fifteen," supplemented Ruby.

"I shall have to run down to the office first; but I'll be back, unless things are going wrong, inside an hour. If I find I can't get away, I'll telephone, and Steve can take you."

"Oh, I hope you can go, Charles," said his wife. "It will be lots more fun."

"*Thank — you.*" With this he arose from the table and others followed suit, scattering as plans necessitated.

"You are quite sure you won't be the least bit

lonely, auntie," asked Carol, solicitously, as, dressed for the ride, she encountered Aunt Lucinda walking up and down the front piazza. Carol looked gay and happy in her auto coat of blue cloth, a long bue veil knotted deftly at her chin.

The old lady stopped and faced her. "No, don't mind me. I'm yewsed tew bein' alone. When I want tew see folks, they're never fur away, an' strangers aire frequently sociable. I've met some rael nice folks, jest by introdewcin' myself. I've met 'em up et Westlake Park sence I come here. A few said they wuz Methodists and one woman told me she wuz a Baptist. Most perfessers of religion aire a desunt sort, ef they live anyways nigh up tew their perfesshun; an' I never make it a p'int tew suspicion 'em, till I hear suthin' tew their disadvantage, er see suthin' which looks convincin'. One o' my sisters married a Baptist preacher. She wuz a Methodist; but she went an' got dipped after she wuz engaged, an' neow she thinks there's nobuddy like a Baptist. I guess she's right. I never see nobuddy else quite like 'em, myself." Sitting in a porch rocker, Aunt Lucinda folded her hands complacently, as she questioned: "I hope yeou aire a believer, Carol?"

"A *believer?*" This was spoken interrogatively, because the designation brought to Carol's mind the diversity of opinions regarding what actually constitutes a believer in religion, and was

followed by her own definition, given with an implication of anticipated doubt on the part of her companion. "God is Love, God is Good. If it is simply believing in love and goodness, I am."

"Wăll, that's a part on't. But yeou sh'u'd believe, tew, that yeou're a poor sinful creetur', an' that yeou ken never save yeourself, no matter what yeou dew."

"I believe with the Elder Brother, that I was made in the image of my Father, and that in my spiritual nature, I am good and beautiful, like Him. Sin,— or error,— is all in the carnal way of thinking. I try not to believe in it at all."

"*Not to believe there's any sin?*" was the shocked inquiry.

"I have no faith in the reality of evil, for I believe that God is all,— and He is good."

"Then where's the yewse of hevin' any plan of salvation?"

"We needed someone to show us a way out of unbelief and fear, and to set us a lovely example of right living. Don't you think so, auntie?" urged Carol. "And don't you remember, He told us not to be afraid? Fear is error."

"'The — way — eout — of — unbelief — and — fear,'" repeated the old lady, as if a strange and awesome light were dazzling her mental vision; then recovering herself, she said: "Dew yeou mean tew say yeou ain't afeerd o' nothin'?"

"Certainly! Why should I be afraid of nothing? It really hasn't any power, any more than

darkness after the sun has gone down. It's just an absence of something. Don't you see? — entirely negative."

"And ain't yeou afeerd of an automobīle, when it goes gallivantin' among the street keers and sech like?"

"No, auntie, I'm not afraid, because as I said, there's nothing in God's world to be afraid of."

"Ain't yeou afeerd there'll be an earthquake while yeou're here?"

"No, auntie."

"Wăll, there's liable tew be, an' what w'u'd yeou dew ef there wuz one?"

"I would try to remember that God is here, and He is all."

"Wăll, I never. What be yeou, anyheow,— one o' them 'ere Christian Scientists?"

"Just a believer, I think," laughed Carol.

"Wăll, I s'pose yeou'll admit yeou dew wrong, sometimes. Ain't yeou afeerd of bein' punished?"

"No, for I do not wish to do wrong, and God looks at the intention, not the act."

"Humph! I guess I'll go an' get on my shawl an' bunnit an' ride along with yeou in Charles's automobīle. Ef a young thing like yeou ain't afeerd o' nothin', an old woman like me shouldn't be nuther."

With these words solemnly spoken, Mrs. Dobbins arose from the rocker, and Carol, taking her arm with a hearty: "I'm awfully glad, auntie," helped her upstairs, calling out midway to Mrs.

Morley: "Aunt Lucinda's going, Mrs. Morley. We'll be ready in a minute!"

The hostess lifted her hands in involuntary amazement, as she thought: "That girl! She can do anything with anybody!" To Carol she called back: "Good! We'll have a jolly time."

Mr. Morley was also astonished when the ladies appeared at the curb; Aunt Lucinda following Carol and looking almost as stylish as that young lady, as Carol had fastened another long veil over the dull bonnet and tied a natty bow at the chin, similar to that in her own.

"You going, after all those protestations, aunt?" asked her grandnephew.

"Yes, I'm a goin'. I can't be outdone by a chit of a girl in trustin' Proverdunce."

"How's that? Won you over, did she?"

"Yes, she won me over. She says there ain't nothin' in God's world tew be afeerd on, an' I'm goin' tew take her word fer it, this time. The Bible tells us tew prove all things, an' I'm goin' a provin'."

"You are in for it now, sure," said Mr. Morley aside to Carol, with a look of combined amusement and admiration.

"I'm not afraid," iterated the girl.

Down Seventh Street, with its smooth paving, they rode to Broadway, Mr. Morley himself steering the motor. Aunt Lucinda sat meekly in the tonneau between Carol and Mrs. Morley, who engaged her attention in objects of interest which

they passed. The quiet, swiftly gliding car, with little to obstruct, gave small cause for anxiety, and the country-bred woman acknowledged that it was like coasting on the Bolton hills, in her younger days.

"We yewsed tew take a sleigh, neow an' then, on a moonlit night, an' one of the boys w'u'd steer on a 'bob.' We'd go fer a mile deown one hill after anuther, a bumpin' over the hummicks, an' callin' it fun."

"Ever take a header?" asked Phil, overhearing.

"Wăll, neow, I can't say 't I know what a header is; but I never happuned tew meet with no se'rous accerdunts," she admitted. "Joe Murrill, one of eour neighbors, got his leg broke one winter. His sled bumped an' he riz right up in the air and fell headlong ag'in' a tree."

"It's a wonder it didn't break his head instead of his leg," returned Phil.

"He wuz sort of a wooden head anyway. Mebbe that's why it took his leg," she croaked: "He needed a wooden one tew match."

"Pretty nearly all wooden then, wasn't he? Poor fellow," he said as they turned on Broadway.

"Neow we're a comin' tew Bedlam," she observed. "Streetkeers a runnin' ev'ry which way — an'— Fer mercy's sake! What *dew* yeou call that thing that jest went by?"

"A motorcycle, aunt," said Mrs. Morley.

"It's turrible rackety. I never see one afore, though I s'pose they hev 'em over tew Rockville, and mebbe Hartford."

Another moment, she cried: "Wăll, we come *mighty nigh* runnin' intew that 'ere team," and glancing behind: "There's a car a comin' right ontew us, Ida — Dew make Charles — *Dew make him* get eout o' this 'ere track!" With this she tightly closed her lips, held herself rigid, with the exception of her eyes, which she turned from side to side, to view every possible opportunity for a collision.

"What a fine driver Mr. Morley is," said Carol, soothingly; "so skillful in making stops and short turns."

"Yes, he always keeps his head," answered Mrs. Morley, "and he's quick to 'catch on.' I always feel safe when he is driving."

It seemed impossible for Mrs. Dobbins to relax a muscle until the party were well out on the Pasadena Boulevard, and were skimming past the avenues, where, clustered among the hills and surrounded by bloom, were numerous dwellings, ranging in magnitude from the small bungalow to the more ornate mansion.

"Now you are glad you came, aren't you, auntie?" questioned Carol.

"I ain't got the proof yet. I'm waitin'," was the answer.

Almost immediately, was heard a "BANG — WHIZZ — *whirr — r-r-r —*!"

"Land o' livin'!" she ejaculated. Her face paled, and her thin lips instinctively fell apart.

"We are not hurt, auntie, nor shall we be," was Carol's calm response.

Mr. Morley stopped the car and the men got out. They discovered a puncture,— a long, rusty nail had been inserted into one of the heavy rubber tires. Just how it could have happened was not easily explained.

"Wăll, I'm glad I shan't feel obleeged tew hold fast tew it. It's be'n proved an' it ain't tew be trusted," said Aunt Lucinda, decisively. "I knew a'most heow it w'u'd turn eout, afore we started. Neow, young lady," addressing Carol, "don't tell me ag'in, nuthin' can't hurt yeou! Yeou might hev be'n blown tew atoms, an' then where'd yeou hev be'n? I sh'ud jest like tew know!"

"Possibly I should have been given an opportunity to enter another sphere, and ride in a chariot of fire, like Elijah."

"A chariot of fire!" repeated the old lady, in a subdued tone. "Dew yeou s'pose 'twuz anythin' like this one? Ef 'twuz, I hope I won't hev tew ride in one. I'd ruther be kerried by the angels, ez Lazarus wuz."

As repairs would consume some time, and Sycamore Grove was near by, Mr. Morley suggested that the ladies wait there, or visit the Southwest Museum on the hill opposite. "It's quite a climb, but if you like to look at skulls and Indian relics, it might pay you," he said.

Marshall and the young ladies decided upon the museum,— he "to assist in the climb," he said. Phil remained to aid Mr. Morley, and Mrs. Morley with Aunt Lucinda wandered into the grove where, in the shade of the beautiful, old trees, with beds of bright blossoms in evidence, they sat down on a rustic bench to rest.

"It's rael sort o' peaceful here," said Aunt Lucinda, at length.

"Yes, we might come over some other day and bring our lunch," answered her hostess. "Yonder is a stone fire-place for making coffee," and,— sympathetically,—"we could ride over on the trolley if you preferred."

"Wăll, I dun'no'," she reflected; and apparently, with Carol on her mind, she said: "Dew yeou s'pose that girl ain't raelly afeerd o' nothin', er is she jest a tryin' tew put on?"

"I think she isn't the least bit of a hypocrite, and she is strong in an emergency. A *splendid girl*, I call her."

"Wăll," with a sigh, "I wouldn't mind hevin' a *leetle* more faith in human natur' myself; but I've seen tew much of it tew bank anyways heavy on't. A good deal of it 'pears tew me tew be like the Pharisee's cup an' platter."

CHAPTER XIII

ON, TO SAN GABRIEL

When the car was again in readiness for travel, it was nearly noon.

"We shall lunch in Pasadena, as we planned, I think," said Mr. Morley to the reassembled party, and to his aunt: "We would have you a regular auto-fiend, Aunt Lucinda, give you the speed craze in a few weeks so you wouldn't feel satisfied to ride less than twenty miles an hour."

"Humph! I guess so," was the incredulous rejoinder, as with labored motion she seated herself once more in the tonneau.

After luncheon at one of the large hostelries in the "Crown City," the ride extended over beautiful drives, and like thousands previously, these happy tourists gave ecstatic praise to the rare and commanding scenery, Aunt Lucinda failing, in spite of her prejudices, to be an exception.

Not far from the splendid Orange Grove Avenue, they turned to view the "Sunken Gardens."

"Ef I *could* feel paid fer comin', this 'ere w'u'd pritty nigh pay me," she confessed. "That 'ere grass looks jest like silk plush; an' I w'u'dn't mind hevin' a spread of it on my front yard in Bolton." A little further on, she questioned:

"What dew yeou call that 'ere vine, a runnin' over that heouse, yender, Ida? I never did see sech a vine fer flowerin' an' clamberin'."

"That is a bougainvillea."

"A boganvilye! Wăll I *dew declare*, and them roses! Why they're a spreadin' all over that 'ere wall. I believe I never see nuthin' so han'some."

"Those are the pink Cherokee roses, and they are among our prettiest," said Mrs. Morley.

"There's another rosevine of a different sort, auntie, over on the pretty bungalow," exclaimed Carol. "Talk of climbers! They beat 'Jack and his bean stalk,' don't they?"

"Yes, they sartinly dew!"

"The big poinsettias take my eye," said Marshall: "I tell you, Phil, folks in New England who haven't seen California have a crude idea of the way things look,— at least, I know I had."

"Well, well, old man, you're waking up! Changed your mind about information found tucked away on the bookshelves of the Boston libraries, eh?" answered Phil, slapping his friend good-naturedly on the knee.

"The books are all right, but none but a poet could imagine the reality, even with their help."

"We are going to Alhambra, now," said Mr. Morley, "and I want you to notice the trees in this drive, and before long we'll show you some orange groves, blossoms and oranges on the same trees. California brides may have their wreaths for the picking."

"And husbands, too?" asked Carol, with so demure a face that Phil laughed aloud.

"Husbands are as plentiful as oranges," declared Mr. Morley. "Take your choice, but don't get one overripe. One somewhat green will give better satisfaction in the end. He'll last longer, and will bear packing and shipping better, you know."

"Thank you! I'll be particular then to select one that is a little green," she replied, smiling, "one I can stand in the sun and see ripen."

"And when he is quite ripe, how will you treat him?" asked Marshall, jocosely.

"Oh, that will be for him to decide. I mustn't be too dictatorial."

"The trees seem tew be all a buddin' an' a blossomin' tew, like the rose bushes. Dew yeou hev any kind of vegertation here that don't bear no blossoms?" inquired Aunt Lucinda, ignoring the young people's chaffing.

"Very few things, aunt," answered her hostess.

"The only things I can think of are cigar-stumps," called back Mr. Morley.

"Yes, I guess so." The old lady smiled grimly, as she added: "They're all blowed eout, ain't they?"

At San Gabriel Mission, the party left the car and went through the building, viewing the dim, old paintings; the well-preserved figures of saints, and of the Virgin and Child; the quaint, old altar; the baptismal font, and the remaining bells of an

ancient chime brought from Spain in the long ago. Each dropped coins into the hands of a guide, for the benefit of the mission.

"It's about time for the play to begin," said Mr. Morley, consulting his watch. "Now if you would rather not go in, aunt, there is plenty to be seen outside. There was an old grape vine near here, I remember, sometime ago, I presume it's here yet. It had a trunk like a huge tree, and the branches spread over thousands of square feet. I was told the grapes it bore in one season would weigh several tons. Then there's an old burying ground somewhere about, and the souvenir shops over across, where you can get clay water bottles and jugs and things, pottery, they call it, made by the Indians, or Indian baskets of all sorts, big and little. You'll want to take something of the kind home to Mary, I suppose. Anyway, it should interest you, and when you get tired, just take a seat in the car."

"Wäll, I thank yeou, an' mebbe I'll look areound a spell, an' mebbe I'll take a notion tew go in an' see fer myself heow them old mission fathers acted when they wuz tryin' tew convert the natives. I s'pose likely they'll look 'ez big ez life an' twice ez nat'ral,' pictered eout on the stage."

"They're all right, I tell *you*," affirmed the host. "I read somewhere, just lately, that out of twenty-three thousand population at one time, there were about eighteen thousand Indian converts. That's going some! I rather think it

would run Billy Sunday a pretty close second. Eh, aunt?"

"Billy Sunday! Accordin' tew the papers, a good deal of his talk comes pritty nigh tew blasphemy."

"Perhaps he doesn't say quite all the papers make out; but anyhow, we must give him credit for putting some mighty tough old reprobates, that most folks couldn't tackle, on the upgrade. A good many stay put, too."

"Wăll, mebbe they dew. I'm no jedge, but I'd ruther hear some good, eddicated, Methodist preacher, myself."

All but Aunt Lucinda entered the theatre at the hour of opening. Turning to look back, near the close of the first act, Mrs. Morley espied her elderly guest, gazing with rapt interest at the stage.

At the close of the play, Phil overtook Aunt Lucinda walking toward the Morley car.

"Well, how did you like it, auntie?" he asked.

"It might be wuss. Ef it hadn't 'a' be'n abeout missionaries, I sh'u'dn't 'a' gone in. I don't want yeou tew think I'd keowtenunce a common thēātre."

"There are a good many plays as interesting and instructive, I think you would find, and preach a sermon that sets people to thinking about the wrongs that should be righted."

"Wăll, I dun'no' — I dun'no'. I'm most tew old tew learn new tricks. I've proved the old ways, an' I think they can't be bettered much."

They had left San Gabriel at a distance, and Mr. Morley had been watching with the keen interest of a lover of the sport, the smooth running of the car over the boulevard.

"What do you think of this for a drive?" he asked, turning his head and looking at Aunt Lucinda for an instant.

"I'd like it ef I felt ez safe ez I dew drivin' my old white hoss. I'd feel a little safer ridin' this way, ef there wuz a track tew hold the gearin' deown, kinder, like the steamkeers hev."

"I think we're having a splendid time and are making a magnificent run, Mr. Morley," said Carol, and asked: "Will you let me drive sometime?"

"Yes; if you think you can do it, I think so too."

"Oh, thank you!"

"She can drive all right," volunteered Ruby, "I've ridden with her at the wheel in Denver. She drives a big car like this one. The last time we went, there were eight girls of us, and we got along fine."

"And you, do you do that?" asked Marshall of Ruby.

"No. Father won't allow me to. Mother and I have an electric that we drive. But I would drive a touring car if I might. I'm not afraid."

"Let's race 'em some day," said Phil to Ruby, with a confident smile. He himself was an expert also.

"Oh, *will* you?" Carol's enthusiasm gave a leap, and her eyes were like stars beneath the blue veil.

"Yes, sure," agreed Phil.

Mrs. Morley laughed, while Aunt Lucinda tried to think of something sufficiently concise to express her disapproval of "female chauffeurs."

"When shall it come off?" asked Carol of Phil.

"Anytime,— to-morrow, if you say so,— provided we can find a road where speeding isn't 'under the ban.'"

"I've learned everything about a car, from tire to starter. I went down to the shops and made it a study, so father says he would be willing to trust me anywhere with one, so long as I would keep to the traveled roads, and not try to scour canyons, or climb mountains where there isn't any trail, or swim swollen streams — or —"

"Cross the ocean on a whale's back?" suggested Phil.

"Yes," laughed Carol.

"Wăll, I never!" exclaimed Aunt Lucinda, at length able to get in a word: "What won't yeou young folks think of next? It's bad enough when a man is steerin', an' ef a chit uv a girl gets a hold o' the wheel, in my jedgment, she'll be a stakin' her life on a turrible resky prepersition. Ef they took a notion tew buck, where'd yeou be, I wonder?"

"Right at the wheel, auntie," was the cheery answer. "Oh, I can steer! You mustn't worry about me."

"Ef yeou wuz my girl, I'm afeered I wouldn't hev a minute's peace uv my life."

"Do you honestly think I'm such a terror?"

"Humph! Sort o' careless like, seems tew me. Yeou don't place enough value on yeourself."

"Oh,— *that*—"

"She doesn't need to, auntie. The rest of us will do that for her. She is a trump!" was Phil's verdict, and Carol looked at him gratefully.

"Wăll, I've gi'n yeou fair warnin'," replied the old lady, circumspectly, "so neow I shan't be tew blame ef yeou get yeour necks broke. In my opinion, yeou've no bus'ness a losin' yeour heads," — and she could not refrain from adding,—"nor yeour hearts nuther, in a reckless manner."

"Mine has already been lost and found a good many times, I think," said Carol. "The last time I lost it,— my heart, I mean,— was when I 'flunked in trig.'"

"What's that? '*Flunked in trig?*'" was the astonished inquiry, from the lips of Aunt Lucinda. She believed that the girl was making light of her serious admonitions; but Carol meant no harm. She felt like snatching the elder woman's prejudices with a merry tug and tossing them to the winds of oblivion, if that were possible. But noticing that she was giving vent to considerable feeling by twitching the knot in her veil as if it were choking her, Carol took the withered hand, with its covering of lisle thread, in her own, and explained:

"That is a phrase we use at school, auntie, and

means failure to pass in examination. I meant that I failed to pass in trigonometry, and that it rather disheartened me for a little while,— not for long, for the springs inside bobbed up and sent me 'kiting.' That is, begging your pardon, away up into the optimistic regions. I'm naturally lively and jolly, don't you know?"

"So that's it? Wăll, it beats me. Ichabod Simmons's Jared missed pritty nigh all the questions put tew him, when he wuz examined fer a teacher's certif'kit, in eour teownship; but I never heerd nobuddy say he flunked. Folks kinder pitied him, though, fer he'd be'n a steddyin' up fer months. But here we be, a comin' tew the biz'ness deestrict ag'in. I dew hope we won't hev anuther breakdown!"

"Are you sure the tires are all right now," asked Mrs. Morley of her husband, for Aunt Lucinda's benefit.

"Strong? Why they are as strong as old-fashioned theology," he answered, decisively.

"An' jest tew think, a nail punched a hole in one of 'em in half a minute, this mornin'!" rejoined Aunt Lucinda.

"That was unusual," said Phil.

"We've never had it happen before," asserted Mrs. Morley.

When at last the old lady descended from the "machine" at the Morley home, she looked tired and worried, and said to Carol: "I can't never learn tew like automobiles, tew please nobuddy; an'

ef yeou young folks aire a goin' a racin' in 'em, I don't want tew know nuthin' abeout it, till it's all over."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, auntie! I think we shall have to give up the race; the torment you would endure if you suspected we were going would more than balance the fun we might get out of it. It wouldn't be worth while."

"*Dew yeou mean tew say yeou'd give it up tew spare my feelin's?*"

"Surely," nodded Carol. "I couldn't feel happy if I knew you were miserable; so you see I'm a bit selfish, after all."

"Dew yeou *raelly mean* yeou'll give it up?"

"Certainly! Why not?" asked Carol, amused at her earnestness, and persistent doubts.

"Wăll," was the reply, "ef yeou dew give it up, yeou're a likelier girl than I thought yeou wuz. I guess mebbe yeou'd make a pritty good Methodist, ef yeou'd leave off some o' yeour fancy fixin's an' dress plain."

Phil shook his head dubiously, as he walked into the house beside the girl.

"Isn't it robbing Peter to pay Paul?" he said, with a smile at the bright upturned face.

"I'll pay Peter some other way, this time," she answered.

CHAPTER XIV

AN "AT HOME"

"I suppose you men folks had no end of sport poking around those La Brea Pits this morning. And did you find any more mammoth skeletons? Those at the Park Museum are perfectly wonderful," said Mrs. Morley to Phil and Marshall on their return from those places of interest.

"A remarkable find," assented Marshall. "I'm glad I saw the spot where they were discovered, though we didn't try our hands at digging for more."

"I want to engage you and Phil to help do the honors at our 'At Home' this afternoon," she continued. "I'll have Charles drop in, too, and there'll be other men of your acquaintance,— Mr. 'Patsy,' as the girls call him, and Dr. Merriman. Isn't he the jolliest man? I should think he could cure anyone just by showing his beaming face and telling them how well they are getting on. And Mr. Nicholson seems so susceptible to nice people and pretty things. How quickly he discovered the graces of that young Virginia girl. We hope to see her here, too, and her mother."

"Thanks, and acceptance," they agreed.

Carol glanced significantly, meanwhile, at Ruby; and Phil, noting her expression, said: "I suppose one could see graces in the bluebell, if deprived of the rose."

"Are you the rose, Ruby?" asked Marshall, slyly, and Mrs. Morley looked chagrined.

"Did I make a blunder? Pardon it. He's a nice man, anyway, and bluebells are dear."

"There's just the difference that one's taste creates," he acknowledged. "I have nothing, nothing at all against bluebells."

Carol would not add further to Ruby's embarrassment, and said only: "If it were not for the blesséd difference in tastes some of the sweetest blossoms would go 'a-begging.' I think I must belong to the cacti tribe,— capricious, thorny, pricking conservative people, and only once in awhile flaming out in a really brilliant achievement, corresponding to the scarlet flower on the hall tabouret."

"Like that of winning Aunt Lucinda's goodwill, yesterday. That was superbly done," commended Phil.

"I think she feels I am continually trying to make a sieve of her convictions."

"Convictions that can be punched aren't worth having," he returned as Mr. Morley entered the room.

"Talking science, or embroidery?" he asked, noticing the needlework close at hand.

"Psychology," answered his wife, "as applied

to some people we know. But it is lunch time and I must go call your aunt."

"Let me, please," begged Carol, whirling away. "So much taffy has weakened my powers of resistance," she averred, dimpling.

As she mounted the stairway, they heard her whistling a popular air. Mrs. Dobbins heard her, also, and came to meet her.

"'A whistling girl an' a crowin' hen,'" she protested, not unkindly.

"Oh, I know they used to say that, auntie; but they don't any more. They have whistling classes, now, don't you know, and some of the girls in our crowd in Denver whistle *delightfully*. It would make you feel as if you were *soaring*, to listen."

"Can they beat yeou at it?"

"Oh, my, yes, by a long way," laughed Carol.

"Wăll, I dun'no'. I sh'ud want tew hear 'em afore I made up my mind they c'u'd beat yeou."

"It's a fact," she replied, "you see I have never taken lessons in whistling. But the folks sent me to call you to lunch. I want to show you the orchids, first, though," and slipping an arm around the elder lady's waist, as if she were a cherished girl friend, she led her to the living room table, where the choice flowers were grouped in a dainty basket.

"Aren't they perfectly lovely, auntie?"

"Cur'us, kinder, ain't they? They look some like eour swamp apple blossoms, back East," and

touching her nose to a lilac-tinted petal: "There ain't much smell to 'em, is they?" she concluded; and addressing Mrs. Morley: "What's goin' on, Ida, that yeour trimmin' up so?"

"Just an afternoon at home, aunt,— for receiving callers."

"Yeou won't mind ef I don't come deown tew meet 'em. I never did go much on stylish doin's, an' I'd ruther stay up stairs."

"No, I shan't mind, if you are comfortable," answered the hostess.

Soon after three o'clock, P. M., Mrs. Doane, the mother of little Jamie, arrived.

Next, came the Misses Hendley, in a taxi-cab. They were young lady students at a school of oratory in the city, and were prettily gowned in white. Aunt Lucinda saw them from the front balcony window, and commented: "They look kinder tasty and nice, I must say."

Two little girls, also in white, with flaring, white ribbon bows, like butterfly wings, outspread on their braided hair, came to act as ushers, and Mrs. Morley introduced the four to her young lady house-guests,— Carol, in an exquisite creation of white lace over blue charmeuse, and Ruby, in a similar gown of pink, which contrasted well with her own of spangled black net, over chiffon and silk.

A limousine rolled up the driveway, quickly following the cab. It contained four ladies and a liveried chauffeur. Among the four ladies who

alighted, the watcher at the balcony window noticed particularly an elderly person wearing gray puffs and little curls, above much glossy black velvet, and a ruff of lace. She seemed to diffuse the essence of aristocracy, and of personal dignity.

Several ladies came on foot, from near-by homes, gay in tailor-made suits of elaborate manufacture, in silks under wonderful opera wraps,— in salmon-pinks and golden-browns, sage-greens and Alice-blue,— like a human bouquet.

"Land sakes!" was the exclamation which silently escaped Aunt Lucinda's lips, and her thoughts ran on this wise: "I never did see sech a lot o' fine fixin's. Why they beat the folks that come eout frum Hartford tew Crēshy Dale's weddin'. I thought they wuz dressed tol'able smart, tew. I sh'u'd think some of these 'ere women had tried tew imertate a sunsettin'."

A little later, in an electric phaeton, came an elderly lady with a sweet face and wavy white hair, and the softest of gray silk gowns. Her escort, an old gentleman in black, lifted her gently to the pavement and helped her up the steps to the cement walk on the lawn, then waving his hand in adieu, re-entered the phaeton, and rode away.

"Neow she's a rael lady," decided Aunt Lucinda. "I wonder ef Ida asked her to see me. I'd orter go deown."

For some minutes she meditated on the prudence of changing her plans about remaining up stairs; but the longer she gazed at the incoming

stream of callers, the more she felt convinced that she was missing something unusual in her life, and that she might regret having done so on her return to New England, when her country acquaintance should call to talk of her remarkable trip to the Pacific Coast.

"Mebbe it's my dewty tew see all I ken, witheout committin' sin, fer the sake of my Mary an' the rest. Jimmie's wife w'u'd jest dote on l'arnin' heow they dress in Californy, an' so w'u'd Ezry Steeple's wife and Aunt Liddy Hogan, an' Dr. Jared Boyleses's wife,— she's young, yet,— and then there's Samanthy Daggett, who's be'n bedrid fer more'n six years. Yes, I dew believe I'd orter go deown."

One of the Misses Hendley was reading when Aunt Lucinda appeared in her black henrietta gown, the white crepe shawl and cameo pin.

A fleshy woman with much-bejeweled fingers that seemed to send off sparks of red and green fire as she twirled an expensive fan, looked up at the approaching figure on the stairway, while in laughing mood. Others turned their heads slightly, and smiles were upon all faces.

"Wăll, I guess mebbe I've gone an' done it, neow," thought the intruder, stopping suddenly in her dilemma and standing stiffly, and very erect, with an injured air, as if in some unaccountable way she had provoked the laughter.

The reader stood near one of the large pillars supporting the arch between living room and recep-

tion hall, and as her fresh young voice mimicked that of an antiquated spinster at a quilting bee, where gossip was the order of the day, Mrs. Dobbins seemed a representative of that very class,— a vivid and picturesque illustration of the function described.

As she listened, her indignation arose, steadily, and at the close, when laughter and applause were at their height, she descended to the hall in all the dignity of an outraged matron, sought Mrs. Morley, with threatening mien, and drawing her aside, whispered the excited inquiry: "Did yeou know, Ida, that 'ere girl wuz a goin' tew speak that piece afore she come?"

"Why no, aunt. I asked her to read something amusing, and she made her own selection."

"Well, don't yeou think it's onladylike tew mock folks?"

"Oh, that was just a made-up thing, you see, a monologue. It wasn't about real people."

"I say it wuz jest like old Miss Fitch! I c'u'd see jest heow she yewsed tew look, ez plain ez I see yeou. Why 'twuz turrible! Miss Fitch wuz a gadder an' a busybuddy; but land sakes alive, she's be'n dead this ten year, an' I can't bear tew think of her bein' resurrected!"

Guests were pressing close, and Mrs. Morley with a "Come, aunt, let me take you to meet Mrs. Graham,— she's the dearest old lady, just as dear as can be,—" hurried Mrs. Dobbins to a further corner of the room, where sat the lady in the soft

gray silk, who had come in the phaeton. Aunt Lucinda was appeased.

Carol had promised to sing, and seeing this elderly guest safe under the benevolent oversight of Mrs. Graham, Mrs. Morley reminded Carol of her promise.

With Ruby at the piano, Carol stood awaiting the prelude to a song of "Dreams." Some one raised a curtain, thinking to give the accompanist more light. Sun rays stole over a huge rose-red rose in a silver vase, and points of light flashed rainbow hues over Carol's blue-white gown and glinted in her fluffy hair. Her blue eyes held unwonted charm.

Mrs. Graham said softly to Mrs. Dobbins: "What a beautiful girl! I am sure she can sing, by her looks."

"Yes, she ken. She ken beat any young thing I ever see at it; an' she's rael kind-hearted, though yeou *wouldn't* expect it in a susciety girl."

"I know. Her face discloses her character, too."

But Carol was singing. A few who were being served to frappé in the den left their glasses and tiptoed into the living room. Others, taking tea and dainties in the dining room, and a richly garbed lady who poured, became immediately silent. The rich, pure soprano voice, floated through the rooms, as spontaneously as a bird's in the open.

An encore followed, and yet another. At the

second call, she sang the song which had so pleased Phil on a previous day, not knowing that he, with Marshall and Mr. Morley had entered.

As she stood, later, receiving praises, surrounded by a persistent group, Phil without warning came near, and their eyes met. It was like a confession. Carol nodded and quickly turned away her face. Her cheeks were the color of the rose-red rose and her eyes shone like veritable soul-lights. Those who talked with her were charmed by her beauty and her enthusiasm. She seemed a being apart,— a wonder-girl,— she might almost have dropped into their midst from another sphere.

It was several minutes before opportunity was given Phil to speak with her. By that time she had regained her self-possession. He had been greeting the Denver people, Dr. and Mrs. Merriman and Mr. Winthrop. In the rush of conversation, he said low to Carol: "You sang a little bit ago as if you had learned the secret of the lilies and tree tops."

She was glad he did not add: "Have you? And will you tell it to me?"

"I was sorry I wasn't aware of your coming in. I would have sung something else," she said.

"Why?" he questioned.

"One tires of hearing most things over and over. I know it by heart, and Ruby could play the accompaniment without notes. I hoped that to some of the guests, at least, it was unfamiliar."

"It sounded better to me this afternoon than it did the last time I heard it," he declared.

She looked at him with an air of incredulity, as Ruby interposed: "Do excuse me, but Mrs. Morley wants the quartette, that selection we gave at the serenade. Marshall has consented."

"Shall we try it?" Carol asked of Phil.

"Yes," he answered readily. "Go ahead. I'll help," and as Ruby turned away: "Do you care to know why that other piece sounded better to me to-day?" he asked of Carol.

"If you please," she said.

"It is because I have learned more of the singer and her motives."

"Oh, thank you! Of course you mean that to be complimentary?"

"Why no, not exactly. Just a little credit to my own comprehension. *You* haven't changed."

"Ah, I see! At first you thought my vein of humor abnormal."

"Not that, either, begging your pardon for seeming to disagree with you so much. But I have learned better to distinguish your mirthful from your serious moods."

"Don't feel too sure, Phil," she laughed; but her eyes held an acquiescence which overbalanced her command.

When the quartette were released, Carol found herself beside Mr. Nicholson. He had been one to applaud most heartily.

"You folks must have awfully jolly times up here," he said to her.

"We do have good times. I wish you and Miss Tolmy were nearer."

"Miss Tolmy? She is a right nice young lady, but quiet. I can hardly think of enough to say for both of us."

"I thought you were getting on famously, at the picnic."

"Oh, we get on, you know. But say, Carol, tell me what a fellow could do with himself, if time were to drag at home? Would you advise a man to marry,— provided he might,— unless he felt sure he could make good there? I don't approve of a married man seeking solace at clubs, after business hours."

"Perhaps the young lady doesn't feel quite at ease with you on such short acquaintance. It may be there is some embarrassment on her part, I mean."

"No. It isn't that."

"Have you tried sending her books and flowers?" mischievously.

"Well, no; but I've taken her to shows — and — Well, I'm sure I'm not the one to awaken 'Love's young dream' in her heart. Perhaps — because —"

"Oh, you can't tell me, Patsy. I know already, and I shall not breathe the secret to Ruby. But you are doing fine,— just splendid!"

"I want you all down to our hotel to-morrow evening. I'm getting hungry for a good laugh," he said, abruptly.

"I rather think we will all go down."

"Good! I shall live until then."

"My dear man. Is it so bad?" and Carol laughed merrily at his evident seriousness. "Cheer up, and don't lose faith. I believe it will all come out *just right!*"

"Carol, I want you to meet my friend Mrs. Wallaber and her niece. They're *swell!*" whispered Mrs. Morley, close to Carol's ear; and taking her arm with an apology to Mr. Nicholson, she led her away.

He glanced hallward. Marshall was interviewing Miss Tolmy. Her face was more animated than he had before seen it. Ruby stood near the piano, and was, at the moment, unoccupied. Unable to resist the temptation, he walked over, and began almost immediately to talk to her of Miss Tolmy.

"Isn't she looking fine, to-day,— quite rested? Doesn't she display excellent taste in her dress? Her mother told me the pearl necklace the daughter has on is a family heirloom."

"I suppose she is a considerable heiress," responded Ruby.

"Half a million, I'm told."

"Ah, Patsy, I hadn't surmised you were so avaricious."

"Did I say I was wishing for any of it?"

"You intimated as much."

"I generally say what I mean, don't I?"

"Y-es — sometimes, anyway. But you have hardly made yourself visible, up here."

"That is no joke."

"No — and I had thought you really cared — a little — bit."

"For you?"

"Whether we were properly looked after,— Carol and I. I had supposed you would show some interest." This with a smile lest she seem too anxious about the turn of affairs.

"Haven't I? Why I've given you every opportunity possible." Directly they saw Mrs. Tolmy advancing toward them. There was small chance for private conversation.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Guild; but daughter and I feel that we must be going. I've come to tell you how much I enjoyed your music. You accompany with so much expression, and I distinguished your voice in the quartette. Evelyn plays, but she doesn't like to, in company. She's like her father, and he was always backward about displaying his talents publicly. But do come down and see us."

"I shall," said Ruby; "and you are good to praise me so much. Carol soars so far above me. Don't you think she is a wonder?"

Mrs. Tolmy smiled as she replied: "You are quite unassuming, Miss Guild. I'm sure I think you are, both of you, quite unusual girls; and

those young men,— they must be interesting companions for you, being so musical."

Just then Miss Tolmy stepped up to say "Good afternoon" and "Such a lovely time."

The three walked away side by side. Mr. Nicholson had given Ruby's hand a parting clasp,— a hurried one, she thought,— and a careless nod. She believed that he admired Miss Tolmy and the mother. She saw him assist her with a little wrap which she had carried on her arm, and she wondered if he were trying to deceive himself by thinking that he could soon forget his old friends — his *particular* friend — herself. Or, was he trying to deceive *her?* She felt that she would like to know. She was almost sure that Phil cared much for Carol, and she was confident that she, herself, should never care especially for Hubert Marshall. He was kind, reasonably attentive, most gentlemanly, always. Yet, she scarcely liked to acknowledge it, she believed that Marshall, like herself, was a trifle disappointed. He had come expecting to renew acquaintance with a girl he had greatly admired in the East. The young lady had treated him with every consideration; but she had, in various subtle ways, noted by the watchful eyes and ears of her dearest girl friend, shown a preference for Phil. There matters stood, and she really had no wish to blame anyone, for she felt it could not be helped.

Many were leaving now, and Ruby advanced to meet others who wished to say good-by.

Carol, bright, beautiful as a goddess, happy in seeing,— as she believed,— others happy, was gayest of them all.

"Don't you forget that invitation, now," said Mr. Nicholson, at parting; and to Ruby: "I'm inviting you folks all down to dinner to-morrow evening."

"Thank you," she answered, simply.

"Wasn't it a success, girls?" asked Mrs. Morley, when the last caller had departed; "And, Charles, do say for once that you enjoyed an 'at home.'"

"'Twas remarkably clever,— nice crowd," he conceded.

"A charming affair," said Marshall.

"Thoroughly delightful," added Phil.

"And now, girlies?" suggested Mrs. Morley.

"It was simply perfect!" exclaimed Carol.

"Everything it could have been,— subtracting my part of it," was Ruby's offering.

"Now hear that child!" said Mrs. Morley, lifting her hands deprecatingly. "I owe almost every bit of the charm to you young people."

"And are we to have any dinner to-night," submitted her husband with a wink at the younger ladies.

Glancing at the mantel clock: "I declare! It's twenty minutes past six. But I couldn't hurry people away, now could I?"

"However anxious you were to do so," finished Mr. Morley.

"*Charles Henry*—"

At this juncture, Aunt Lucinda appeared in gingham gown and white apron, announcing that "supper" was "a waitin'." Oddly, no one had noticed her disappearance from the reception rooms.

"I've be'n a showin' the cook heow tew make an old-fashioned apple pie, with layers of salt pork in between," she said, "and we're a goin' tew hev it fer desert. It looks ez ef it w'u'd be fust rate."

CHAPTER XV

MR. NICHOLSON ENTERTAINS

A private dining room in the big hotel which sheltered the Denver acquaintances was more than usually gorgeous. A table with covers laid for twelve had, over the white damask cloth, a scarf of orange satin, and there were bows of orange satin ribbon at the corners; bows fastened to chair backs and ribbons festooned from the chandeliers overhead. A rustic basket of oranges, over a silver-rimmed mirror,— spaces filled in with orange sprigs, waxy leaves and blossoms,— formed a centre piece for the table. Blossoms and leaves were scattered over the orange scarf. Place-cards bore orange sprigs in water colors, and there were boutonnières of orange blossoms, besides souvenirs for each guest, in orange-colored satin boxes, bon bons for the ladies, cigars for the gentlemen. Orange-colored shades were over electric bulbs and candles, and here and there, on the walls, were orange boughs, bright with blossoms. The odor of oranges pervaded the room, and Mr. Nicholson, giving directions, began to wonder if it were too much of a very good thing.

"I'll have Mrs. Merriman down," he said.

Fortunately, the lady was in. She whisked off a small white apron, over which she had been knitting something soft and woolly, and consented to oblige.

"But why didn't you call Evelyn?"— meaning Miss Tolmy. "She is probably up to this sort of thing. I'm not an artist, you know, Mr. Nicholson," she said, apologetically.

"You are an old acquaintance, and I think you will tell me the truth. I don't want any flattery in mine."

"Oh, that's it?" and Mrs. Merriman's well-developed shoulders shook in amusive unison with her light laughter.

The assistants were nearly through with the scheme of decorating as at first planned.

"Now what's the matter?" asked Mr. Nicholson of Mrs. Merriman as she surveyed the room in silence, though her face betokened an appreciative interest.

"My! It's gay, isn't it?" she answered, presently. "Was it your idea, Mr. Nicholson?"

"Yes, you see we don't have these things so plentiful at home."

"Well, I should say not, and they're *beautiful.*"

"Is that all they are?"

"Why, the fragrance. Did you mean that it might be too strong?"

"That's it. Now you've hit it, exactly. Please tell me what to do about it."

"Have you any ferns?"

"No, nothing but orange."

"You might dispense with the little individual bouquets, and some of the blossoms on the scarf and other places,— distribute them later in the parlor, don't you see?"

"Yes. Thanks. Too many bows?"

"Well —" laughingly —"they're ever so pretty."

"Take off some of them, do!"

With a gracious smile, Mrs. Merriman removed the corner bows from the table, plucked blossoms discriminately from various places, filled a plate with the boutonnières, and then she said: "Just a little of the asparagus plumosis, or of the maidenhair fern, would soften up things, don't you know, Mr. Nicholson?"

"You are a jewel, Mrs. Merriman! I'll tell the doctor so;" and "Here, one of you fellers, won't you go somewhere — right off — and get an armful of — What did you call it, Mrs. Merriman?"

"Asparagus plumosis —"

"That's it, and some of the other, maidenhair, and please hurry." With this Mr. Nicholson dropped some silver coins into the hand of a youth, and dismissed him on the errand.

"You see I wanted something a bit original,— but I'm willing you should share the honors, Mrs. Merriman,— and say: What do you think of my taking in Mrs. Tolmy to dinner, and I'll ask Mr. Morley to be your escort, and that would leave his wife for Dr. Merriman."

"All right," she agreed: "But who is to have the young lady,— Evelyn?"

"I'll get Winthrop to ask her. His sister will be at the beach. Then there'll be Ruby and young Tracy,— that will suit, I reckon,— and Marshall and Carol."

"M-m-m-m-e-e — All thought out," she commented.

"Any criticisms?"

"No — only I happened to see Carol talking with Mr. Tracy at the reception, and she looked, and he looked,— well, you know,— as if they were more than good friends."

"And Ruby?"

"I don't know, but I didn't notice any sheep's eyes between her and that Marshall,— all plain sailing, just everyday sort of friendship, I judged."

"Well, let's change 'em 'round, to-night. No harm done."

"No. No harm, I hope, either way."

"You have good eyes, Mrs. Merriman."

"Thank you. It's not hard to see, sometimes, with only ordinary eyesight."

Directly, the boy returned with the ferns, and Mrs. Merriman helped in their arrangement. Finally, she said: "Now I must go and prink, or I shall not be in keeping with all these fine fixings."

Early evening brought the guests. When the lights were on and the company seated, Mrs.

Morley said to Dr. Merriman: "It's really wonderful what a bachelor can think of, all by himself. Are you sure Miss Tolmy hadn't a hand in the scheme?"

"Sure as can be. He wanted to surprise her, I suppose."

"Well, she ought to appreciate that. We think Mr. Nicholson is fine, Mr. Morley and I, such a bright business man, too, Carol says."

"Does Ruby have nothing to say?"

"Nothing much. Wonders why he stays away so from our place, and thinks he must be interested in the Virginia girl."

"Ah? Good," the doctor replied, rubbing his hands complacently.

Mr. Nicholson sat at the head of the table, with Mrs. Tolmy at his right; the daughter, with Mr. Winthrop, at his left. Dr. Merriman and Mrs. Morley were at the foot. Midway sat Carol and Ruby, one on either side, queenly in dainty apparel, and seemingly satisfied with Mr. Nicholson's disposition of people and things.

The host was at his best, and had a store of good humor and anecdotes for the occasion.

"Doesn't Patsy look well this evening?" asked Carol, low, of Marshall. "He has certainly the mark of a domestic man. One can see that he thoroughly enjoys presiding at his own table."

"Quite so. How about me, have I the mark?" he questioned lightly.

"Not so plain. You're sort of indifferent, that is, you are more interested in something else, at present."

A little frown crept between Marshall's eyes, though he did not dream of it. "Don't you think a man *should* be more interested in accumulating means before he thinks seriously of establishing himself in a home of his own?"

"No; in my opinion —" for an instant Carol hesitated, with a half smile, then determined to speak what was in her mind, "he ought to have the home thought uppermost, first, last, and all the time. A boy should be trained with that idea as a goal toward which all his energies and his education and efforts should be directed,— a goal to be reached at his earliest convenience, after he shall have become of age,— before he shall have become crusty and crabbed and opinionated, when he would find it doubly hard to secure a companion with whom he could live amicably. There, I have been honest with you."

"That is evident."

"Isn't my advice sensible?"

"I suppose you are theoretically right; but how about the girl? Doesn't she expect so much,— that is, a girl that would be at all congenial to an educated man,— not meaning to be purely personal,— that a fellow has to wait until he is a graybeard before he can well support her?"

"Not the sensible girl. But tell me, what should be expected of *her*, please."

"Carol, what was that little song you sang the evening before we left Denver, 'The Swanlet'? Was that it?" interrupted Mr. Nicholson, quite unintentionally.

"'The Duckling,'" answered Carol, dimples dancing adown the length of the table between them.

"That's it, 'The Duckling'! It's a gem! Will you sing it again after dinner?"

"Yes," she nodded.

"You see I was a bit down in the mouth that evening over a bad trade I had consummated; but that was a wonderful tonic. I haven't got over the effects of it yet. If I were wishing for something I could have, like the kids in fairy tales, I would wish for the talent to compose a piece like that. It's great!"

"Equal to the 'Star-spangled Banner' on the eve of battle?" asked Mr. Winthrop.

"Just about."

"Every time has its song," said Mr. Morley, tritely.

"And every song its interpreter," added Phil, looking toward Carol.

"Some are mistaken interpreters," she suggested, naïvely; but Phil answered confidently: "When they are out of harmony, I suppose," to which she smiled an indulgent affirmative.

"I wasn't mistaken in my interpretation of the duckling piece, I'm sure," said Mr. Nicholson, "for it gave me an inspiration."

"I'm anxious to hear that song," confessed Dr. Merriman; but his wife demurred: "It may not affect you as it did Mr. Nicholson. You see it all depended upon his condition of mind previously."

"Do you mean that to have a proper understanding of it I must have made a poor trade?" he inquired.

"Yes, or lost a patient, or something. You would need to feel somewhat depressed."

"Perhaps it is because misery loves company that 'The Duckling' proved inspiriting in the case of our host. It was a disappointed fowl, probably," ventured Marshall.

Waiters were removing a first course, and substituting a second.

Carol tossed back a stray fluff of gold from her forehead with her jeweled fingers, and appealed to Mr. Nicholson: "Do you think there may be danger of discussing its possibilities so long that it will prove unattractive?"

"Yes, now that you mention it, I do. We will let the discussion rest, if you please," he replied, soberly.

At the same instant there was the click of an electric bell, and an orchestra, which had been unnoticed behind a voluminous screen, began a quaint, catchy air. Carol with leisurely grace arose in her place, and in her most charmingly dramatic manner rendered from beginning to end,

in unison with the hidden instruments, the song of "The Duckling."

Mrs. Morley gave a little gasp at the maneuver. Was it a preconcerted plan? It must have been. Presently she remembered having seen Carol and Mr. Nicholson conversing together before they came down to the dining room.

There was hardly time for an encore or response, and Carol sat down amid the applause, bowing sweetly to every one.

"Were you in the secret, Ruby?" asked Phil.

"Not I. But wasn't it cute? So like Carol."

"Then don't you give Mr. Nicholson any of the credit?"

"Oh, yes, but she was the principal actor. She always is, wherever she goes."

"Except when Miss Ruby alternates," he added chivalrously.

"Thank you. That is so seldom, it's hardly worth mentioning," she insisted.

A laugh from Mr. Winthrop attracted their attention.

"Miss Tolmy has been telling a duckling story," he said.

Other guests called for Miss Tolmy.

With a slight blush of embarrassment, which added to her prettiness, Miss Tolmy recited a bit of humorous verse, drawling out the final words in Southern fashion, quite pleasing to all.

"So unlike Evelyn," said her mother to Mr.

Winthrop afterward. "I'm glad you encouraged her."

"So am I," said Mr. Nicholson. "Won't you say some more verses?"

"That was all of it," she answered with a pleased expression, which deepened as Marshall gave his approval of the reading in a well worded compliment.

"Now, Ruby, it is your turn," said Phil.

Quite to the young lady's satisfaction, she recalled a short story, tragic to the last line, but ending in comedy. So she repeated it. Carol clapped her hands gleefully, and Phil whispered his thanks.

Eight elaborate courses over, the ladies ascended to Mrs. Merriman's parlor, while the gentlemen opened their satin-covered boxes and puffed away the contents as they talked of the war situation, the outlook for Los Angeles with Owens River water brought in, nonpartisanship in politics and other subjects of common interest.

Ruby sat at the piano playing an old melody when Phil stepped up behind her, whistling a snatch of it.

Meanwhile Marshall was saying to Carol: "I am ready to answer your question about the girl, — the part she should assume."

Carol was attentive.

"Her aim should be to cultivate the beauty of the flower and the butterfly, to acquire the essence

of music and art, and to possess the spirit of charity."

"Would you have her neither domestic nor literary,— a beauty, an artist, charitable, without a knowledge of cookery?" she asked, pointedly.

"She could hardly be a thorough artist and omit that, I think. Yes, I meant to include that, and as to literature, of course, to be charitable, she would need to be sympathetic and congenial. An uneducated beauty could not be."

"Ah, I see. She will do very well in that case. I hope you will soon find her." There were no blushes to betray hidden thoughts, and Marshall was well aware that Carol Wilton was not for him.

"This is more like old times," said Mr. Nicholson, joining Phil and Ruby.

"Ask Miss Tolmy to play, Patsy," she said, rising.

Marshall, as the request was made, offered to escort her to the piano.

To Mrs. Tolmy's sincere delight, she consented, and her pink cheeks were a shade deeper when Marshall remained by, watching her soft, flesh-cushioned finger-tips as they executed a difficult classic with precision and a commendable degree of expression. As she stood, he thought of the allusion made at the Morleys to the bluebell, and decided that this young lady was a hybrid,— a very dainty commingling of the bluebell and forget-me-not.

Carol watched the pair, dimpling now at Phil, now at Mr. Nicholson, and by and by, when Miss Tolmy had declined to play more, she began a tra-la-la to a popular air, in which all the young people joined, with Ruby again as accompanist.

Mr. Nicholson, with a look of sublime contentment, sat lounging in a roomy, leather chair, and Miss Evelyn Tolmy seemed no part of his dreamy vision,—at least, he was not looking her way.

Ere long he brought in cards.

"Isn't it late to begin,— half past nine?" questioned Mr. Morley.

"Not for me. I hope you will stay and play, — no money at stake, you see,— just an old-fashioned game of whist, or something."

With the tables came choice of partners.

"Look here, Ruby. I'm pretending I'm at home to-night. I want you to help me out in beating Carol and Mr. Tracy."

Ruby saw that Marshall had Miss Tolmy as his partner.

"All right," she agreed.

For the first time since their coming to the city she had opportunity to study Mr. Nicholson at close range. Once, when he caught her observant eyes, he turned to Miss Tolmy with some trifling question to show that he had not forgotten his lesson. Ruby played remarkably well, he considered, and won his repeated praise. Carol and Phil "dawdled," he declared.

"I don't believe you play cards much, at least not whist," he said to Tracy, as this was the game upon which they had decided.

"No," answered Phil, "I haven't played much for some time."

"What do you play?" asked Mr. Nicholson, "solitaire?"

"Yes, he plays solitaire all the time at the Morleys'," replied Carol in his stead, with a meaning glance at her auburn-haired opposite, which caused Mr. Nicholson to blunder in matching a spade with a heart.

The laugh grew until the four were in a tumult, and Phil remarked that he was quite sure Mr. Nicholson hadn't been playing solitaire lately.

"Well, anyhow, this is what I call jolly. It's the best time I've had,"— and suddenly catching his wits,—"since I went with Miss Tolmy to vaudeville yesterday, no, the day before."

Ruby looked up quickly.

"What was it so funny at vaudeville, Patsy? Do tell us," she urged.

"It's much too long a story to tell just now. Let's reserve it for San Diego. By the way, when do we start?" he asked, quietly.

"I haven't thought," acknowledged Carol. "I don't like to think. It is so perfectly charming right here in Los Angeles."

"You agree, Ruby?"

"To be sure." But Ruby did not seem en-

thusiastic. She wondered if Mrs. and Miss Tolmy would go to San Diego; but she did not like to inquire.

Mr. Morley was setting back his chair and his wife followed his example.

"We must go, or Aunt Lucinda will have the fidgets over us," she asserted.

The ladies bade each other good-night in the parlors, but Mr. Nicholson and Dr. Merriman saw the Morley party to their car. As the former assisted Ruby to enter, she said very sweetly: "You've given us a lovely time, Patsy. Come up and see us."

"Yes, I will," he consented. "And the dinner doings,— they were more yours than mine."

CHAPTER XVI

AN IMPORTANT CALL

"Some one to talk with you, Ruby," called Carol from the telephone in the hall of the Morley home. But, though she recognized the voice, she did not say who.

Ruby laid aside her needlework and hastened to answer, without question.

"Hello," she said, taking up the receiver.

"Oh,— it is you, Patsy. How are you?"

"Yes, it was Carol, and we are fine,— all of us. How is Miss Tolmy?"

"Haven't you? Well — she is probably resting. I was a bit sleepy myself this morning."

"No, I'm not going out,— at least, I don't care about it —"

"Ha, ha; surely. Glad to see you."

"Oh, just whenever convenient — any time —"

"All right. I'll expect you, then."

"Good-by, Patsy,"— and obeying a pressing impulse: —"Shall you bring Miss Tolmy along?"

"No? — Why — yes — to be sure. Just wanted to know, that was all. Well — good-by — I'll be most happy, of course."

Not long after this conversation, Ruby seated herself in the porch swing. She waited over an

hour, with a book in her lap,— a late story of interest to most story-lovers, and by an author of world-wide repute,— but daydreams had proved much more fascinating to this particular young lady. At her back were pillows, high-piled; a Mexican scarf fell across her shoulders; at her feet was a Navajo blanket, and just beyond, an immense bougainvillea, weighted with green foliage and crimson bells with golden tongues, swayed lazily in the soft breeze from the sea.

"How late he is," she concluded. "I wonder if something has kept him, if he won't come, after all. Though he would surely have 'phoned in that case. Poor Patsy! He really seemed afraid I wouldn't care to see him without Miss Tolmy,— Miss Tolmy, indeed! — Well —"

A step on the pavement at some distance away caused her to look quickly down the street. The step had a significant sound, a familiar stamp, and was followed by a vision of Mr. Nicholson's well-groomed, agile figure, walking stick in hand. She noticed that the stick was a new one with an ivory handle, and so intimately were the Tolmys associated of late with Mr. Nicholson in the mind of Ruby, that she caught herself suggesting to some one who seemed to be another self: "Possibly it was a present from Mrs. Tolmy, or from Evelyn." And the other self,— the real self,— good-naturedly acquiesced in the suggestion, and persistently kept it in mind after his arrival. She had time to assure herself that Patsy wasn't so

bad, after all. It shouldn't be surprising if people did wish to give him things. He was always giving to others: people he liked and people he didn't even know, if they were in need, or he felt it might make them happier. And that fine dinner at the hotel—"More hers than his," he had said, and —"Oh, he is good,— good and kind. I wonder I didn't appreciate it all in Denver!"

Springing from her seat with this conclusion, she went to meet him.

"Hello," she said, offering him her hand. "Glad to see you, Patsy."

"Well, now that is something like," he said, taking the hand and holding it as he re-seated her in the swing and himself beside her, when he gently let it fall to her lap.

"All alone? Where's the folks?" he asked.

"Gone to Universal City to see the moving picture plant."

"And didn't you care to go?"

"Not 'specially. I'll hear all about it when the friends return, and then I can imagine what it is like, and I shall have escaped the tired feeling sight-seeing gives one."

"Very well. I came to see you, anyway, so it doesn't matter much about the others."

"Why haven't you been to call before, Patsy?"

"Don't you remember the agreement, child? I was to give you a fair chance, and not to 'butt in,' unless I was needed. I can't say that I have observed any indication of being really needed, yet,

but,— we are making a long stay,— almost a fortnight already; and I thought we ought to make up our minds about leaving for San Diego. The Merrimans would like to go early next week."

"And the Tolmys?"

"They talk of it."

"M-m-m-m-e.— You find Miss Tolmy quite congenial, don't you?"

"She is all right. Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered. Her mother looked as if she thought you were about the whole thing last night — and — say, Patsy, what a pretty new walking stick. Where did you find it?" and, taking it from its resting place on a near-by window ledge, she examined the carved ivory and came,— not wholly unexpectedly,— upon some recent lettering: "J. B. N.," his monogram, and the date, — yesterday's.

"That? Oh, you don't care to know," tentatively.

"Why, yes, I do, Patsy; I'm interested in whatever interests you, don't you know?"

"Well, then, I bought it at a Japanese store. Mrs. Tolmy and Miss Evelyn and I were looking about, and they admired it."

"Oh,— *they*."

"Nice people," he added, unwilling to concede too much at the outset.

"Tell me about the vaudeville show. What was so delightfully amusing there?" persisted Ruby.

"Oh, I can tell you that in a minute; usual thing,— comic songs, Persian wonder, athletes —"

"But last evening you told me that it was a long story — to be reserved for San Diego. Was it Evelyn you found so interesting, and is that why it may be continued indefinitely?"

Mr. Nicholson gazed into Ruby's eyes curiously a moment, and then he answered: "Why, Ruby, you don't mean to say you care — whatever it is?"

"Certainly, I do! Haven't we been friends for years and years?"

"Yes — I hope so."

"Don't you *know* it?"

"I've allowed myself to think so — nearly always. And that you take a sisterly interest in me, I can now believe. Well — I'm grateful for that."

Ruby had replaced the walking stick on the window ledge. Her cheeks were aflame, and to hide her embarrassment she looked down at her rings and toyed with them.

Mr. Nicholson urged, seriously: "Am I right?"

"Y-es — I'm interested in you — as much as if I — were a sister," and lifting her eyes to his, with a half smile: "Why shouldn't I be?"

"You have every right in the world to be interested in me in any way you please," he acknowledged, "and as turn about is fair play, I will say that I haven't lost my interest in you."

"So you will tell me whether you really like Evelyn well enough to marry her?"

"Do you wish me to marry her, Ruby? Men like to know that their sisters are pleased with their choice,— particularly of a wife."

For an instant Ruby was silent. Presently she compelled herself to say: "I ought to be willing, if you wish it. She is a nice girl, I believe — and I have — no right to keep you from marrying the girl you love." Her voice was a little tremulous, and again she toyed with her rings.

"See here, Ruby, I want you to look at me," he commanded gently, but firmly: "How is it about Tracy?"

"He is devoted to Carol."

"And the other fellow?"

"*I* don't want him," was the decided answer.

"Do you want Tracy?"

"No, indeed!" Her hazel eyes were blazing. "I want,— oh, I can't say —"

"Do you want me, dear?" he sacrificed, lifting her unresisting hand. "Because if you do,— why, Ruby,— honestly — I have never felt that I truly belonged to any one else."

"I *do*, Patsy,— I'm *sure* I do," she confessed with downcast eyes. "I've only lately found it out. I have been very, very stupid"; and looking up quickly into his face. "You deserve to know that I've been — oh — dreadfully jealous of you ever since Miss Tolmy,— Evelyn,— came. I haven't been able to think of anything else for

long, and I couldn't feel quite happy even here, where every one is so kind, just through a horrid fear that you would fall in love with Evelyn — and — marry her. There! Now I've told you, and I'm glad it's over with. But wasn't I stupid, Patsy, not to see all along?"

"That I cared most for you?"

"That you are the *nicest man in all the world*, — except my father,— and the only man I really wanted for a husband."

"That pays me up in full, Ruby! I felt that you would do the right thing, whatever you did. If you had decided in favor of the other fellow, I couldn't have blamed you,— but — I'm mighty glad you didn't, little girl."

"And — would — you have liked Evelyn best if I had chosen some one else?"

"Do you suppose I could have learned to like Evelyn best in a week, when I have been loving you for years? — I can't say that I might never have found any one else to love, but I'm not easily turned aside from anything, once it gets a hold upon me. Can't you see?" His eyes held hers with eager questioning.

"I — didn't know," she faltered.

"But you are sure of it now, dear?"

"Yes — quite sure —"

"And I won't need to ask 'papa' for you, Ruby," was a somewhat later declaration. "He kindly informed me before I came away that he would be pleased to have me for a son-in-law."

"Did he — really? And, oh, Patsy, I know mama likes you tremendously well, and so do Dr. and Mrs. Merriman and — everybody."

Mr. Nicholson turned aside his head in modest incredulity.

"It's true, Patsy,— every bit."

Mr. Nicholson laughed, and, finding compliments embarrassing, offered as a diversion: "I heard Miss Tolmy say last evening that she considered Marshall the swellest fellow she had ever met, and the two of them discovered that their grandfathers were chums at Harvard."

"Marshall! If only she could break through his reserve. He has seemed to me afraid to assume big responsibilities,— deplores his lack of means, and the extravagance of the times,— especially of marriageable young ladies. A girl is willing to wait for the man she loves, Patsy, and to work, if need be, to help him on. She doesn't expect a mansion to start with, if he can't afford it, and she would rather have love than a mansion any day, if she can't have both."

"That is like a sensible girl, I am sure. But he may have had some rather bitter experiences with those girls back in Boston."

"Possibly," she laughed. "But, do you know, I don't think I would care for a great big house, Patsy. And we'll have a dear little bungalow, like some we have seen here, won't we? They are so cozy and homelike."

"I've built a home for you over and over in

my mind hundreds of times, Ruby,— nothing is too good for you; but I should like the bungalow myself."

"Out somewhere near the City Park?"

"Yes, anywhere you say."

"Oh, Patsy, you have made me so glad and happy!"

"And I,— *words fail* —"

"And I will write mama this very evening," said Ruby by and by.

"And I will telegraph 'papa.'"

"And we'll have a quiet, little home wedding, won't we?"

"After we return from the trip?"

"Yes, as soon as I can have a trousseau made up. And we'll invite the Morleys, and Carol, and Phil, and Marshall, and Mrs. Tolmy and Evelyn, and—"

"There's the Morley car!"

"Oh, Patsy, shall we tell?"

"If you care to."

"I *do;* I'm as proud — *as proud can be!*"

Mr. Nicholson smiled,— even blushed a trifle,— and wondered if Ruby were proud of him as a fiancé, or just because she was engaged to be married. Girls were inexplicable anyway.

CHAPTER XVII

FURTHER SURPRISES

"How do you do, Mr. Nicholson? Have you and Ruby had a nice visit?" asked Mrs. Morley, meeting them on the porch.

"Fine, thank you, Mrs. Morley, the best ever," he answered.

Mrs. Morley gave him a questioning glance as she replied: "We had hoped you would arrive in time to go out to Universal City with us."

"A little matter of business detained me; and besides, I wanted to have a talk with Ruby," was the significant response.

Mrs. Morley turned to the girl. Her cheeks were fairly pink.

"Has he been telling you good news from home?" she inquired. "You look so happy."

"Ruby and I have been making an engagement, Mrs. Morley," Mr. Nicholson answered in Ruby's stead.

"An — *engagement?*"

"Yes — to be married," he replied, soberly.

"*An — engagement — to — be —married!*" the lady repeated in amazement.

"Yes. I've wanted her for a wife for a good while," he appealed.

"Oh, but that is grand!" exclaimed Mrs. Morley. "I wish you joy,— both of you,— with all my heart."

Carol and Phil rushed out from the hall opportunely, quite unsuspicious of the turn of events.

"Carol — Phil,— what do you think has transpired in our absence?" asked Mrs. Morley excitedly.

"Where?"

"How?" said the two at once.

"Why, right here. I don't know how. It's Ruby and Mr. Nicholson. They've gone and got engaged."

"*You*,— Ruby?" cried Carol, and, penetrating the gravity with her violet eyes dancing and a rush of her body through the space between, she caught the girl friend in her arms and kissed her. Then turning to Mr. Nicholson, who was standing: "Here's to you, my friend — all my sincerest congratulations," and grasping his hand: "I've been hoping and hoping this would be — for, oh, ever so long!"

Phil and Mrs. Morley followed with other handshakes and hearty good wishes as Mrs. Dobbins arrived from spending the day with Mrs. Graham. Mr. Graham had brought her back in the electric phaëton.

"Oh, auntie! What do you suppose has come about since you left us?" said Carol, running to assist the elderly woman up the steps. "We have

an engagement on our hands. Do come, quick!"

"Engagement? What fer?" she asked, stepping on the front gore of her gown in her haste to comply.

"Ruby and Mr. Nicholson are going to be married!"

"Fer pity's sake! *Yeou don't say so?* Not right this minute, be they?"

"Not till you've had a chance to give them your blessing, auntie. At least, I think not."

"Wäll, Ruby," said Mrs. Dobbins, when at last she reached the young lady, "I'm glad yeou're engaged tew an old acquaintunce. It's most yews'ally the safest plan"; and to Mr. Nicholson, "I guess mebbe yeou'll make Ruby a good man. Yeou're old 'nough tew know what yeou aire a doin', and not tew be led by any o' them silly reasons some folks give fer gettin' married. I hope yeou won't ever be sorry, either of yeou." She also shook hands with the pair while Phil and Carol were looking into each other's eyes, and Phil propounded a mute query to which Carol replied with a nod.

"What would you say to another engagement, auntie?" he asked aloud.

"What,—*yeou and Carol?*" and she pointed her forefinger in their direction.

"Yes, we might as well own up," he acknowledged. "Won't you congratulate us?"

Mrs. Morley took out her pocket-handkerchief and began to wipe her eyes, then, recovering her-

self, she said: "*Oh, you children — Well — this is* —"

"A dispensation of Providence?" suggested Phil.

"'He works in wondrous ways,'— myste'rous ways,—'His wonders tew perform,' as the hymn-writer says," declared Aunt Lucinda.

"What's the matter,— what you crying about, Ida?" demanded Mr. Morley, joining the group.

"*Oh, Charles Henry,— we're just crying for joy, I do believe!* These young people here have been getting engaged,— all four of them!"

"Hurrah! That is good news, sure enough! Say, Phil — Carol, and you — over there,— Mr. Nicholson, I hadn't expected you would steal one of our girls while we were away,— but I'm sure it's just completely all right. Shake, all of you, and be happy ever after!" To each he gave his hand and special good wishes.

"Where's Marshall?" asked Mrs. Morley, abruptly.

"Can't prove it by me," said her husband. "He started back on the trolley before we were ready to come; but I supposed we should find him here."

"I heard Miss Tolmy say he intended calling there this afternoon," volunteered Mr. Nicholson.

"Oh, did you, really?" asked Ruby, "and, *my*, I was just feeling a little bit sorry for him, thinking he might feel lonesome up here, don't you know? I think I'll reserve my pity."

"Well," said Mr. Morley, shaking his head slowly, "if you had only been up here oftener, we might have guessed, Mr. Nicholson."

"Let's 'phone Marshall to bring Miss Tolmy up to dinner. You'll stay, won't you, Mr. Nicholson?" begged Mrs. Morley.

"Yes — and thank you."

"Ruby, I shall believe you are a gay deceiver, I am afraid; but I couldn't have planned it better, if I had tried," continued the hostess.

"You can't most always sometimes tell," added Mr. Morley, and Aunt Lucinda contributed: "Looks is turrible deceivin' when yeou ain't a lookin' fer 'em tew be. But I wa'n't noways deceived abeout yeou tew," she averred, nodding at Carol and Phil.

"Why, auntie, weren't we behavin'?" asked Carol, mischievously.

"Behavin'? Wăll, I'm an old woman, an' I've seen lots o' billin' and cooin' in my time."

"Ha, ha," laughed Phil, while Carol's eyes sparkled like jewels in the sunlight.

"And nobody's kissed me," she said with a mimic pout.

"You dear —" said Mrs. Morley, drawing the girl close.

"And now it's your turn, auntie," said Carol.

"Land sakes, I e'en a'most fergot! There!" and a genuine smack resounded from the withered lips, a manifestation of kindly feeling which Carol thoroughly appreciated, though she laughed mer-

rily over the subsequent display of anxiety, when Aunt Lucinda said to them all: "I hope yeour pa's and ma's won't fret."

In the meantime, Marshall had arrived, but evidenced little surprise at the news. He agreed to return for Miss Tolmy, provided she would consent to come. First, he inquired by 'phone, and an affirmative reply took him once more to her hotel.

After dinner, the friends assembled in the living room and stood in little groups, chatting, familiarly. Marshall and Miss Tolmy were near Aunt Lucinda, who, with much animation, related for their benefit her experience on arriving from Mrs. Graham's.

"Greatly shocked, were you?" asked Marshall.

"Wăll, no, kinder supprised, that's all, though I'd be'n a suspicionin' Carol an' Phil; an' it seemed nat'ral that Ruby sh'u'd take up with an' old acquaintunce o' her'n."

"What would you have thought of a third announcement?" was another query, of Marshall.

"*Ours?*" asked Miss Tolmy, smiling at the previous questioner.

Aunt Lucinda lifted her hands in dismay.

"*What's that?*" exclaimed Phil, overhearing.

"*Really?*" — "*No* —" said Mrs. Morley and Carol at the same instant,— the latter protesting involuntarily.

"Do explain," begged Mr. Nicholson.

By this time everyone was listening, and Mar-

shall bravely proceeded to satisfy the curiosity aroused.

"In the first place," he began: "I've had several talks with Mrs. Tolmy and Miss Evelyn, and we find that we have mutual acquaintances in Boston, and at Bar Harbor,— a resort I have frequented with my people in midsummers,— where I have frequently, also, heard of the Tolmys, though we were not so fortunate as to meet. Besides, I have learned from them what I had not known before, that my Grandfather Marshall would probably have married a great-aunt of Miss Evelyn, had not the death of the lady occurred by accident after she had become his fiancée. The engagement came about during a vacation he spent with the family, by invitation of Miss Evelyn's grandfather. So we came very near being cousins. Secondly, a certain young lady, not far distant," here he glanced amicably at Carol, "has menaced me with sordid details of a crabbed, morose, notional, critical, cynical old bachelorhood —"

"*All of that?*" asked Carol, to the amusement of everyone, and then: "Oh, I beg your pardon! I didn't intend to interrupt."

"Granted," he conceded; "and to resume: I was advised to marry early, thereby escaping these manifold ills and acquiring happiness. Consequently, on the way up from the hotel this evening, in the company of Miss Evelyn, I informed her of the double engagement, and suggested that it might be commendable in us, to follow suit. She

offered some seemingly plausible reasons in refutation of my argument, but was finally persuaded to acknowledge that in *our* case they hadn't much weight."

"But we are not going to rush into matrimony," declared Miss Tolmy, coloring prettily and drawling the words a little, in Southern fashion, as he, hesitating, looked toward her expectantly.

"It's to be a sort of trial engagement I believe," he added; "but I shall not be at fault if it isn't made permanent — and soon."

"Ain't yeou afeerd yeou'll be disapp'inted, when yeou find eout each other's failin's? *Ev'ry*buddy has 'em," said Aunt Lucinda dolefully.

"Yes, and we imagine ours are no worse, Mrs. Dobbins," answered Marshall, complacently; "and we hope to exercise charity."

"Wăll, I never see nuthin' like this, an' I've lived tew be a'most eighty," she groaned.

"*I* can't somehow realize it,— everything has been so precipitate," said Mrs. Morley; "but, of course, you are all in earnest."

"*We* were never more so," answered Marshall, soberly.

"Good for you, Marshall!" cried Carol. "I'm as glad as glad can be," and approaching Miss Tolmy, she gave her a belated kiss and wishes of a happy ending to the affair; while Phil, taking Marshall's hand, gave him a long, long look, which eventually banished doubt in the matter, and made it appear altogether right between them.

"Mama knows I've been partial to Marshall all the while," said Evelyn to the ladies who gathered around after Marshall had led her to a seat; and to Ruby, "Mr. Nicholson could only talk of *you*. I have never seen a man so much in love with anyone before."

"Until you met Marshall?" asked Mrs. Morley.

"Oh, I haven't known him long enough to tell," she laughed; "but we will take plenty of time to get acquainted."

"That is right," replied Mrs. Morley.

"We have an old daguerreotype at home of Marshall's grandfather," she continued, brightly. "I almost knew him from that, right away."

"I've heard my father say that he both looks and acts like his grandfather," said Phil. "And if your great-aunt could trust the grandfather, why not the grandniece the great-grandson?"

"So I think," she responded.

"Good luck to you, anyway, Evelyn, if I may be so informal."

"Surely! Marshall says you are like a brother."

"Isn't she sweet?" whispered Carol to their hostess.

"She has her inspiration, to-night," was the reply.

A solemnity had fallen upon the group, which later music failed to dispel. It was as if a strong, resistless current had caught up these young lives

to bear them onward, either to destructive rocks or shoals, or to an open sea,— clear, majestic and full of beauty. The mystery of untried ways impressed them.

CHAPTER XVIII

LITTLE JOURNEYS

Womanlike, particularly motherlike, Mrs. Tolmy felt a drawing of the heart strings upon hearing of her daughter's decision to become engaged. She was an only child, and had been most carefully guarded. Besides, since her father's death she had been an almost inseparable companion. But with a tolerant spirit, the more easily held because of her implicit faith in the character of Hubert Marshall, she wept in silence and in secret, while openly commending the daughter's judgment, yet without urging or desiring anything like haste in the matter.

"You ought to be able to learn each other's ways, and to make up your minds about marrying, by next fall, Evelyn," she said; "I wouldn't think of having a wedding before that."

"Nor I, and Marshall wouldn't, mama," replied Evelyn, "but I feel just as sure as can be that it will come off. It's a feeling I've never had before, like intuition, or what is it, mama? Do you know?"

"Bless you, child, you know as well as I, a

selection of the fittest, I suppose; a soul-mate, some say, that one knows at first sight. But I wouldn't place *too much* stress on it."

Dr. Merriman caught himself smiling many times after the engagements were reported to him by his wife; and she, good woman, spent much of her time sympathizing with Mrs. Tolmy and petting Evelyn.

"I suppose you'll expect to live in Boston, if you marry," she remarked to the latter. "They say Marshall thinks it's the only place there is."

"He told me he would go wherever I wished, and thought he could work up a practice most any place," said Evelyn. "Of course, I shall not wish to be far from mama, and we like Washington, or Baltimore. I feel sure that Marshall will come into prominence in his profession, and some day he may be a judge of the Supreme Court. He's so *distinguished* looking. Don't you think he is, Mrs. Merriman?"

"I do, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised to find him a Supreme Court judge. He's smart, and blood will tell."

"Yes, that is a great consolation," assented Mrs. Tolmy. "We know he is of a fine family."

"It isn't as if Evelyn had fallen in love with some titled foreigner, who would, as likely as not, make a rake of a husband," said Mrs. Merriman, tritely.

"No, indeed I'm glad she has chosen an American, like ourselves; and most girls marry at some

time in their lives. We did," she laughed, "and we didn't do so badly."

At the Morleys', late at night and early next morning, these momentous affairs were discussed and re-discussed, up stairs and down stairs, and even in Stephen's quarters, for in some unaccountable way, the news had leaked into the kitchen. For a brief period, there was a constant whirl of excitement.

"I suppose you young people haven't forgotten that we are to take an excursion to Riverside to-day," said Mrs. Morley, at length, "and you must see Redlands, and Smiley Heights; and after that, Mt. Lowe, and Catalina —"

"And only three or four days to do them in," said Phil, "for it has been decided that we go to San Diego early next week."

"Oh, dear," sighed Mrs. Morley, "why can't you stay right along; just settle here? You can't find a better place."

"That is easy to believe," said Carol.

"We'll come back and take you and Charles with us to the Panama Pacific Exposition," offered Phil, cheerfully.

"Oh, wouldn't that be lovely, if they'll go," said Carol.

"Ida can go as well as not, if I can't," Mr. Morley answered.

"Oh, I shall wait until you can go too, Charles," she declared: "I couldn't be happy up

there looking at all those beautiful sights and thinking of you working away alone at home."

"There is wifely sympathy illustrated for us," said Marshall.

"And the unselfish husband exemplified, too," submitted Phil.

"I shall always think of you, Mr. and Mrs. Morley, as a model couple," exclaimed Ruby.

"We've been 'keeping the best foot forward,' since you came," said Mr. Morley without a semblance of a smile, and his wife added:

"'There's more truth than poetry' in that. You should have seen us dressing it up before you came." And laughing aloud, she questioned: "I wonder what they would have thought if they had seen me among the paint pots and samples of wall paper?"

"Ha, ha," laughed Phil in turn. "Did you go to all that trouble for us?"

"Not exactly; but you stirred up our ambition, don't you know," she replied. "As to being models, we make no pretentions, though it's nice of you to say so, Ruby."

A little later, Stephen with the car was waiting under the porte-cochère.

"Them young folks have 'livened things up equal to a circus, with the parades and side shows thrown in," he told himself. "'T will seem lonesome like, when they're gone. And to think they come a beggin' or pretendin' to," he chuckled,

giving his head, meanwhile, an affirmative shake. "The old lady, she's jolly, too, in a way, but,— Gimminy Christmas! — how she hates this gasoline wagon." At this point, Stephen rubbed his knee with his gloved hand, as if it might help him to realize a wish that the party would appear.

Presently, out they came, Mr. and Mrs. Morley, Carol, Ruby, Phil and Mr. Nicholson, with grips and wraps for a trip across country. The Denver people at the hotel, the Tolmys and their maid, Marshall and Mrs. Dobbins were to meet them that evening at Riverside,— the hotel contingent and others named going by rail.

"It's suthin' of an undertakin' fer me," said the old lady to Mrs. Merriman, "but they dew say it's wuth the trouble of goin'. It *wouldn't* be wuth it tew me, ef I hed tew ride in that 'ere machine of Charles's."

"No? Well, one does have to get used to them."

"I c'u'd as soon get yewsed tew a cyclone, seems tew me. They aire a good deal like 'em, in some respecks: a whizzin' an' whirrin' an' tearin' along, fillin' the air with dust, an' ez likely ez not upsettin' things that come in their way. I'm thanful yeou aire willin' tew take me with yeou."

At six P. M., those who went by rail were at the famous Mission Inn. They had removed their wraps and were awaiting the arrival of the Morley car.

"It's strange they aren't in," said Dr. Merriman, who for the third or fourth time had traversed the piazzas, looking for the absent party.

"They are probably all right, somewhere," said his wife. "You know you've told me a thousand times that it doesn't do anyone any good to worry."

"That's a fact. It does *harm;* but they should have been here an hour ago, and we're all hungry, at least I am."

"Very likely they have taken some side trip to see some unusual thing, a model ranch, perhaps. The country is perfectly wonderful! But don't for anything scare old Mrs. Dobbins. She's mortally afraid of an automobile, anyway."

The old lady sat at one end of a large sun parlor and was conversing with Mrs. Tolmy.

Quarter past six — half past — quarter of seven — and still the Morley party were absent.

"You'd better take the rest of the women folks here, and go in to dinner," suggested the doctor to his wife. "Possibly Marshall will go with you. I'll watch out awhile longer, though probably they wouldn't expect anyone to, and would rather we would all eat."

"I think so," she replied; and turning to Marshall, who was also on the watch, she asked his opinion.

"I'm not anticipating trouble," he said, "that is, anything serious. Some trivial accident may

have caused delay for repairs. I'll take you ladies in to dinner, if you wish."

But the two failed to induce Mrs. Tolmy, Evelyn or Aunt Lucinda to go to the dining room.

"We would feel better to wait and dine together when they shall have come," said Mrs. Tolmy.

"I haven't much appetite, I ate so heartily at lunch time," said Evelyn.

"I thought you were imitating a bird," said Marshall. "How do you subsist on so little?"

"You couldn't have been very observing," she laughed. "Do I look like a fairy, Mrs. Merriman?"

"I should call you quite a substantial young lady; but I've known people to thrive on very little, sometimes — that is a small amount of victuals — where there's a mental or *heart* stimulus," she said, smiling at Marshall.

"Ah, Mrs. Merriman, I'm glad to hear you say that," he returned. "I'll remember it, not to save victuals, but worry," he admitted.

Aunt Lucinda was strangely silent.

"Aren't you hungry, auntie?" asked Mrs. Merriman, who had readily adopted the familiar title.

"No, I never feel like eatin' when mebbe there's trouble fer some o' my folks," she answered, grimly. "We don't none of us know what's happened. Mebbe they're all a lyin' stark dead by the roadside, this minute. I can't help a thinkin'

that mebbe they wuz all tew happy last night, tew hev it last."

"I think not," said Mrs. Merriman. "We ought to be happy, when it's possible."

"Well, I'm glad *we* are here," said Evelyn. "We know *we* are safe."

"I dun'no' abeout that child," objected Aunt Lucinda. "We ken never tell what may happen tew any of us. There might be an earthquake, or a simoon, 'r a tidal wave, 'r suthin' tew destroy us right here. We're all sinful creetur's."

"Oh!" exclaimed Evelyn, with a joyous, little start: "Look there!"

Directly there appeared, at the entrance of the sun parlor, a radiant face overtopped by fluffy, golden hair; and a sweetly musical voice rang out with the words: "Here I am, auntie and Evelyn and all,— and the rest are coming. Did you worry about us? The doctor thought so. I'm awfully sorry. We stopped back aways to see a really and truly aeroplane, right where we could examine it closely, and we saw it start off and go sailing — oh — ever so high! It was grand! I wanted to go up in it, but the folks wouldn't let me."

Mrs. Dobbins had jumped up at sight of Carol as if she had seen an apparition, and as the girl drew nearer, she reached out her bony hands, letting them fall on Carol's shoulders, as she asserted solemnly, "Ef yeou hed a be'n killed, child, I'd a'most,— I don't say quite, but a'most,— lost my

faith in Proverdunce. 'T w'u'd 'a' g'in it a turrible shock!"

"Oh, I'm quite alive, auntie, thank you, and ravenously hungry," declared Carol, patting the old lady's cheek, dimples deepening as she smiled.

A little later, walking with her to the dining room, she drew the lady's hand within her arm and said low: "Whatever happens don't worry auntie, especially about me. I'm young and not very wise, perhaps, but it looks to me, this way: God couldn't have made us free, in every right sense of the word, and then have shut us up in a safety-deposit vault. Now, *could* he? — And suppose, auntie, your son, Jimmie, should play a game of foot-ball and get his nose mashed, or his elbow dislocated by the means, then some one should come to you and say he thought 'twas cruel and negligent in Jimmie's wife not to have prevented him in the first place, when she might have done so. You would feel like saying that Jimmie wasn't tied to his wife's apron strings. *Wouldn't* you? And that Jimmie's wife wouldn't *want* him to be."

"Wăll, mebbe — mebbe I would. I should think Jimmie wuz dreffful foolish ef he got intew sech a scrape with sech a big fam'ly dependunt on him. But I wouldn't want nobuddy tew say my Jimmie wuz henpecked."

"No, indeed you wouldn't! And Jimmie wouldn't endanger his life without some good reason; nor would I."

"Wăll," quoted Aunt Lucinda, "'A little child shell lead 'em,' an' I guess mebbe yeou're a leadin' — an' I'm willin'," she murmured. "Things look sorter skewin' to old folks, sometimes, I guess, mebbe."

Leaving the dining room, the party stopped in the lobby to consider some plan for spending the evening "pleasantly and profitably," as Dr. Merriman put it. Someone volunteered the information that an organ recital in the chapel was "on," and someone else, that an amateur minstrel performance would be held at a certain music hall for the benefit of some philanthropic organization.

"I believe that would suit us," said the doctor. "What do you think, good people? And will you go with the rest, Mrs. Dobbins?"

"Ef Carol goes, I'm a goin'," she assented. "I guess mebbe ef it's tew be home talunt, an' fer charity, it ain't nuthin' very bad."

All decided to attend the minstrel show, and found it quite amusing. Mrs. Dobbins was as gay as a short time before she had been depressed, and laughed until tears filled her eyes over a touching little "coon song" sung by a tot of six or seven, blackened to the depths of charcoal, barefooted and clothed in a curtailed garment of white cheesecloth.

"Real funny, ain't it, auntie?" whispered Phil, in her ear.

"Humph! It's redikerlus; but I can't help laughin'," she answered.

"That is an indication that you are happy and thankful," he observed.

"I be — an' I hope it'll last a spell," she confessed.

Another day, a shift of scenes, and the party, having left the shaded drives and splendid views of Riverside, were winding their way up the noted Smiley Heights, at Redlands. It was a hillside garden, a magnificent private park, an earthly paradise: banks of flowers in variety, overshadowing trees, sunlight filtering through to earth, making rainbows in dewdrops and fountain-sprays; and below, an expanse of splendid ranch lands, stretching out, green and golden, in waves of grass, blossom-sprinkled; in twining vines, and fruit-laden trees, to the grand chain of the Sierras. It was a joy to breathe, a joy to see, a joy to feel! Carol expressed the joy in words, when she said: "A bevy of angels would make it a manifestation of Heaven!"

"Yeou'll dew fer one of 'em, I guess," said Mrs. Dobbins, who had begged to be allowed to ride with her favorite.

"If she only had some wings, now," said Phil.

"The sperit of human kindness will dew jest as well, I guess, mebbe," was the reply.

A day of rain followed; beautiful, softly pouring rain, which the ranchers welcomed; and townspeople were apparently little inconvenienced by it.

"The first, for us," said Marshall, "and we like to see all sorts while we are here."

Again, sunshine, and Catalina Island, with its extended beach, its stretches of blue sea, beyond, its mountains, hotels and cottages, and its wonderful glass-bottomed boats, in which the party surveyed the exquisite marine gardens alongshore.

Afterward, came a visit to Mt. Lowe, with its steep "incline," its dizzy line of railway over chasms and up ascending grades, revealing yet more of the splendors of valley and hillside.

Then, Mt. Wilson, the lofty, with its long, sinuous trail, red cheeks and "jollification."

"Picking oranges and orange blossoms from green trees this morning, and snowballing this afternoon, all within a radius of a few miles!" exclaimed Phil. "That's going some!"

"It beats me! In fact, I've nothing more to say," replied Marshall.

"Not if I should hit you squarely on the nose with this?" asked Evelyn, playfully holding up a formidable looking ball, her face aglow, and her blue eyes scintillant.

Marshall retaliated by catching girl and ball, and with the latter, rubbing, not too strenuously, the girl's already rosy cheeks.

Carol remarked slyly to Ruby: "The bluebell has become a rose! Do look! *Isn't she cute?*"

"I wouldn't have believed she could be so full of fun," answered Ruby, pressing snow in her two

hands which she intended for Mr. Morley, who had shown himself a belligerent.

"Ah, there! Look out, Ruby! There's another ball coming," shouted Phil.

Ruby dodged quickly, and, stumbling over an unnoticed obstacle in the path, fell into a snow bank. Phil and Mr. Morley rushed to the rescue; but Ruby, unhurt, had picked herself up in an instant, and having clung to her ball with one hand, tossed it at close range, knocking Phil's hat askew.

"That's what I call plucky," said Mr. Morley. "I haven't had so much sport in a dog's age."

"Nor I," said Phil, replacing his hat.

At this juncture, Mrs. Morley and Mr. Nicholson appeared, and the lady announced: "Tea is ready in our shanty."

CHAPTER XIX

GOOD-BY

"Off for San Diego!" Phil's voice reached the delinquent young ladies, giving last touches to their traveling garb, in the room above stairs, which, for a fortnight, quickly passed, had held the many little appurtenances of their wardrobe; kept secretly within its four walls the confidences they had there whispered to each other, and had been a place of seclusion for tumultuous thoughts, both grave and gay.

Carol, keenly alive to the sentiment of things, exclaimed: "Wherever we go, there will never be a dearer place for us, than this. Why, Ruby, I feel as if we had made friends with the furniture; and I would like to shake hands with every piece, and say fare-you-well to the doorknob!"

"I suppose — But do let's hurry! I believe they are leaving us down below."

"Here goes," obeyed Carol and tossed a kiss from her fingers, indiscriminately, as she said: "Good-by, dear, dear room!"

Phil met her at the top of the stairway.

"Hello," she said, surprised.

"That room! If it had ears, I should be jealous," he laughed. "Anything for me to carry down?"

"Yes, these umbrellas, please, and — say, Phil,— would you mind carrying me?"

At the instant, she turned and, fleeing along the corridor, escaped her pursuer by a hand's breadth, as she ran, half leaped down the back stairs and out into the kitchen, where the cook, bread-knife in hand, gaped at the scurrying pair.

"Here we are, and good-by," gasped Carol.

"My! But you give me the scare. And it's sorry I be that you're goin'," she said.

Phil offered her his disengaged hand for a parting shake. "I hope you will pardon the fright," he said: "We *were* rather unceremonious," and he slipped a bill into her palm, "to keep for luck."

Carol opened her Japanese bag and took out some trinkets which she and Ruby had purchased for the cook and second maid.

In the upper hall, Mrs. Dobbins was saying excitedly, to Ruby: "Did yeou hear that turrible noise jest neow, like suthin' tumblin'? Dew yeou s'pose somebuddy's hurt? — Carol, mebbe?"

"I think not, Mrs. Dobbins. It was Carol and Phil having a race."

"Wäll, I never! I sh'u'd think they'd be tired 'nough tew set deown and rest a spell, after bein' up pritty much all night with comp'ny. I never *could* see no yewse in tuckerin' yeourself all eout jest ez yeour goin' tew start on a journey."

"Ho — ho — ha — ha — ha," from below.

"There they be neow! Such goin's on!" said Mrs. Dobbins, softly.

"Want your veil tied, auntie?" called Carol, presently, catching a glimpse of the old lady as she peered down over the balustrade.

In the same moment, she was at the top of the stairs to assist.

"Why, yes, yeou might pin it to the back of my bunnit, ef yeou want tew," was the meek reply.

"Do you think I'm a terror, again, auntie? I'm so happy I feel like dancing a jig, right now. Will you dance with me? Do — just once — *please* do," and catching the elder woman firmly by the waist, she swung her around, once, twice, thrice, as she hummed a merry air to keep time.

"Wăll, yeou beat me! Is that what yeou call waltzin'?" she asked, as her feet rested again on the floor.

"Yes, auntie, and isn't it jolly? Want to waltz some more?"

"I guess mebbe that'll dew fer this time. We don't want tew be late fer the train; and don't yeou, raelly now, think it's kinder friverlous?"

"I would call it being frivolous to spend most of my time that way, just as I would to spend most of it eating bread and honey, or playing cards, or golf, or going to shows, or on my knees praying, or at church,—'temperance in all things,' you know. But once in awhile, auntie,— just once in awhile,— there's positively nothing else which can express my mood like dancing." Carol proceeded to fasten the gloves on the worn hands, as she continued, soberly: "Do you suppose,

auntie, that Heaven can ever be anywhere, except within ourselves? "

"Why, yes; the Bible tells abeout the New Jerus'lum and — the many mansions. It must be some sort of a *place*, it 'pears tew me."

"Of which Los Angeles, with its beautiful homes, is typical? "

"I sh'u'd say they ain't nuthin' on earth that ken be compared tew it."

"Sometimes, you know, people are awfully unhappy in the very most beautiful places in all the world. Don't you believe happiness, even in Heaven, must depend on the way we feel? "

The gloves were fastened, and Carol laid the camel's-hair shawl across her arm as she spoke.

"I dun'no', child — 'Ask me suthin' easy' as my Lishy w'u'd say. But ef I ever get intew one o' them he'v'nly mansions, I shell expect tew be happy. Anybuddy who can't be, won't belong."

"That's logic, *good, sound* logic, I think, auntie," concluded Carol, supporting her companion down the stairway. "I wish you were going with us, to San Diego; but you'll promise to come and visit me, sometime, won't you, auntie? Will you come to my *wedding?* " she whispered.

"I'd love tew, but I don't s'pose I ken. Yeou must bring Phil tew see me, afterwa'ds."

"All ready? Time to start," called Mr. Morley from the doorway leading to the porte-cochère.

A short drive, and a few steps brought the party

to the long platform of the station, where the ladies gave each other parting injunctions and renewed their declarations of the happy, happy time spent in Los Angeles. The gentlemen were attending to baggage and checks.

Dr. Merriman was smiling and brisk, the dyspeptic patient was likewise smiling, and almost brisk. Mr. Nicholson, ever thoughtful of others, returned from the baggage room with a box of chocolate caramels, which he had extracted from his grip and generously proceeded to distribute, together with some pocket-folders gotten out by the company over whose road they were to travel.

Miss Tolmy in a suit of blue was chatting enthusiastically, with Miss Winthrop and Marshall.

"Don't Marshall and Miss Tolmy make a stunning couple?" asked Mrs. Morley of Ruby.

"Yes, and they can afford to be with half a million in prospect. I am glad Marshall had the good luck to get her."

"Why? He doesn't need the money, 'specially."

"No, but it will give him confidence."

"Marshall's professional ability, which Phil tells us is most promising, should offset the girl's financial prospects through her ancestors."

"To be sure. They are well-mated, I think," concluded Ruby.

"Now tell us, Mrs. Morley, how glad you are to see us going," demanded the doctor, stepping

up. "It'll give you a needed rest, don't you know?"

"Oh, it's *dreadful* to lose you, all at once, nearly, too! Aunt Lucinda and I shall feel like old mother-birds going back to a deserted nest. Won't we, aunt?"

"'Twill be pritty lonesome; but we'll hev tew stan' it. They's nuthin' else we ken dew, ez I ken see," then, as the thought occurred to her: "Yeou folks must write tew us, an' tell us heow yeou aire a gettin' on, an' heow yeou like the fair."

"To be sure we will," answered Phil; and Carol patted her on the shoulder as if she were a baby, and her very own.

"I hope yeou'll allers be good tew her, Phil. I've made up my mind she's wuth it," she admonished.

"Trust me," he said, gripping her hand: "You'll see us at Bolton on our wedding trip, possibly. We won't forget you, anyway, wherever we go."

"Well, good-by, auntie, good-by all. We've had the most *delightful* visit ever, Mrs. Morley," said Carol, and off dashed the vivacious couple through the iron gateway leading to the tracks.

Mr. Morley followed with some of their grips.

"Good-by, Aunt Lucinda. Good-by, Mrs. Morley. I've had 'the time of my life,'" exclaimed Ruby, kissing them both, hastily. This declaration, though trite, was none the less acceptable.

The last farewells over, Mrs. Morley inquired of Mrs. Dobbins: "Wouldn't you rather have Steve drive us around a little and then take lunch at a café than to go directly home? It will seem so lonely there, I feel like putting off as long as I can."

"Jest ez yeou say, Ida, ef 'twon't be tew much expense. You've be'n tew an awful lot, hevin' so much comp'ny."

"We've been more than paid in the good times we've had," she replied.

Mrs. Dobbins had but little longer to remain in the city, as the Seldens soon arrived, and after a brief visit, took her away with them to San Francisco.

"The last remnant of our house party!" said Mr. Morley to his wife, as he picked up a forgotten handkerchief marked "L. D." from the floor of the living room. "Aunt Lucinda wouldn't have left that a few years ago. It shows age on her part."

"She still has a pretty keen mind, though, Charles, and I shall miss her a great deal more than I had expected to, and in a different way."

"Yes," with a smile twitching the corners of his mouth, "I never saw such a change in anybody in a short time, before, in my life. Why she wasn't a bad person to have around, by the time she got ready to go. That's a fact. You and Carol reconstructed her, someway."

"Give the credit to Carol. That girl would

make a domestic pussy of a wildcat, or a diplomat of a bushwhacker! Phil was mighty lucky to win her."

"So I think; and I'm glad Ruby chose Mr. Nicholson. She couldn't have been happy with Marshall, they're too much alike."

"I hadn't thought of it, but I believe you are right. And isn't it perfectly wonderful how Miss Tolmy blossomed out in his company?"

Mr. Morley chuckled. "I think, at bottom, the whole arrangement is chiefly your doing, Ida."

"I've felt the weight of responsibility, I can assure you," she acknowledged. "If one of those couples *should* turn out badly —"

"Don't you worry! They are thoroughbreds, every one of them, and there's little danger of divorces following such mating."

"I'm very glad to hear you say so, Charles. But *they* have assumed *big responsibilities*. Just think of that!"

"No more than we assumed, are they? Besides, I'd rather think of something to eat, just now. Is dinner most ready?" he asked with a fine air of nonchalance, which elicited from Mrs. Morley the characteristic response:

"Charles Henry! How can you?"

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